







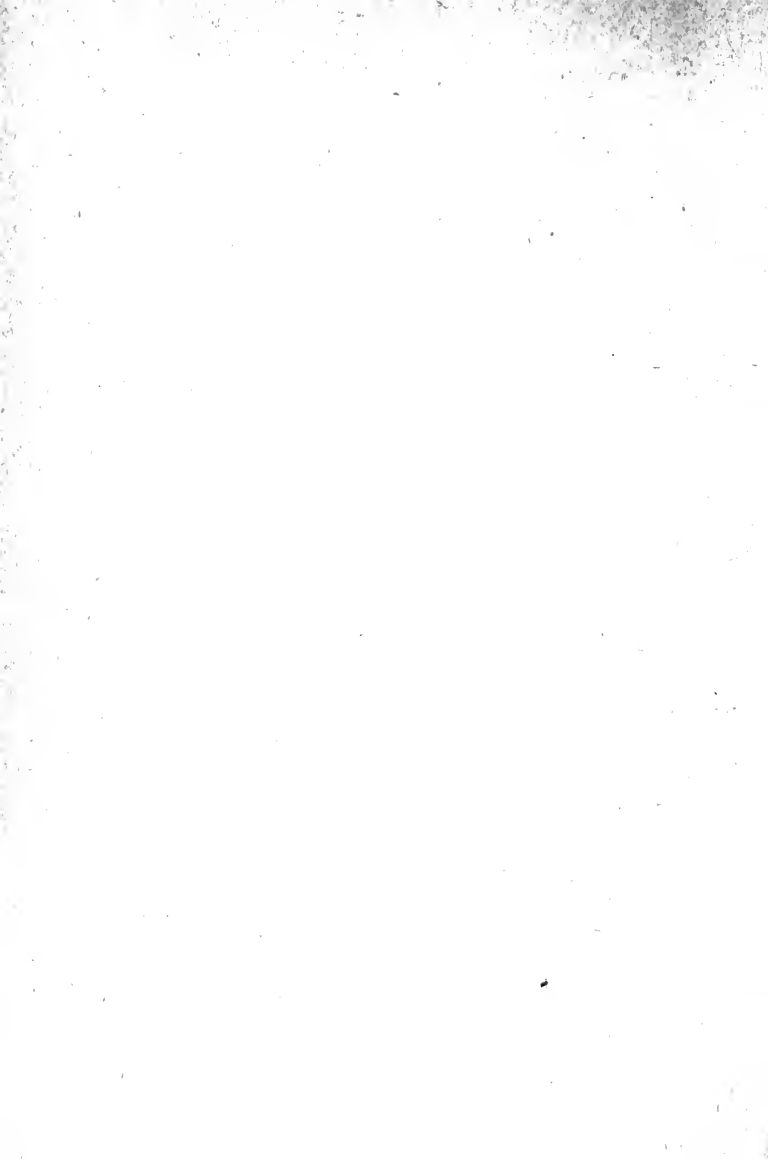


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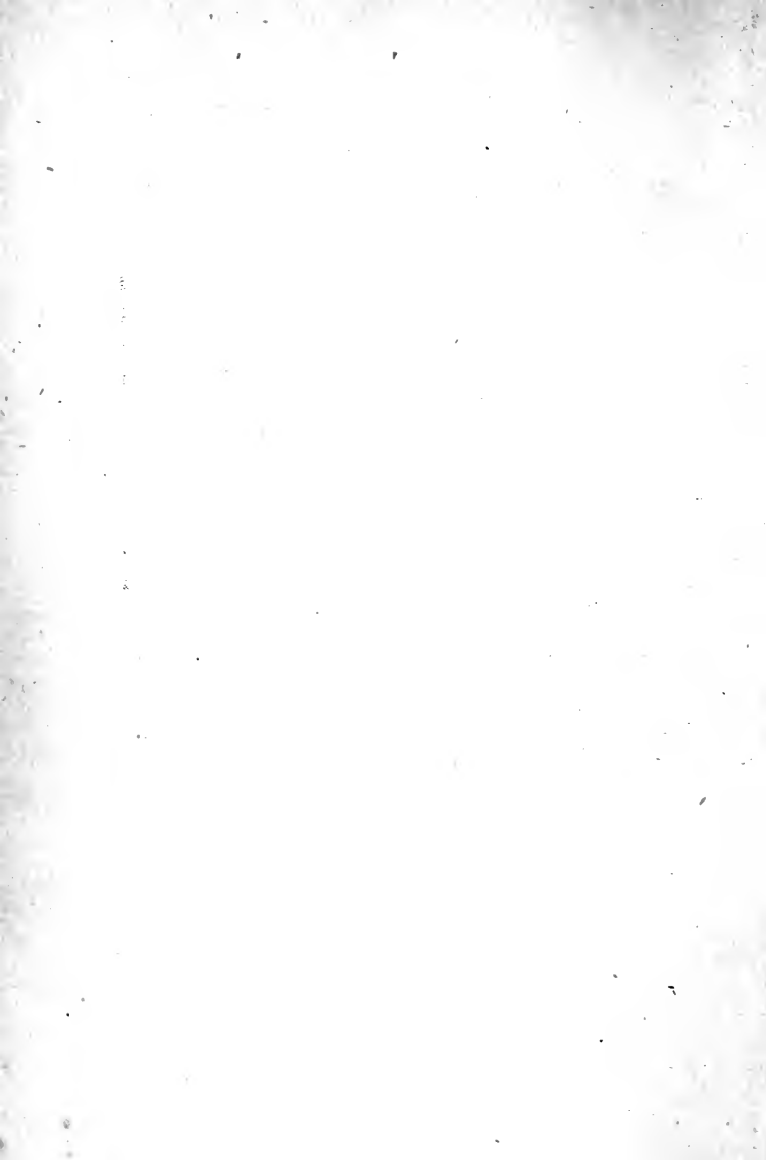
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A ROSE IN JUNE.

VOL. II.





# A ROSE IN JUNE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

“CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,”

“OMBRA,” “MAY,”

&c. &c.

“Rose, thou hast thorns,” said I,  
“That prick who toucheth thee.”  
“Yea, passer-by,  
The unwary hand that plucks at me.  
But I, although to sweetness born,  
Whene’er the wild wind blows,”  
(Thus breathed the Rose)  
“Feel in my heart the angry thorn.”  
SONG.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,  
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1874.

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LONDON:  
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL,  
BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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## A ROSE IN JUNE.

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### CHAPTER I.

WHEN Rose went up the creaking stairs to bed on that memorable night her feelings were like those of some one who has just been overtaken by one of the great catastrophes of nature—a hurricane or an earthquake—and who, though escaped for the moment, hears the tempest gathering in another quarter, and knows that this is but the first flash of its wrath, and that he has yet worse encounters to meet. I am of Mr. Incledon's opinion—or rather

of the doubt fast ripening into an opinion in his mind—that he had made a mistake, and that possibly if he had taken Rose herself “with the tear in her eye,” and pressed his suit at first hand, he might have succeeded better; but such might-bes are always doubtful to affirm and impossible to prove. She sat down for a while in her cold room, where the draughts were playing freely about, and where there was no fire—to think; but as for thinking, that was an impossible operation in face of the continued gleams of fancy which kept showing now one scene to her, now another; and of the ringing echo of her mother’s words which kept sounding through and through the stillness. Self-indulgence—choosing her own pleasure rather than her duty—what she liked in-

stead of what was right. Rose was far too much confused to make out how it was that these reproaches seemed to her instinct so inappropriate to the question; she only felt it vaguely, and cried a little at the thought of the selfishness attributed to her; for there is no opprobrious word that cuts so deeply into the breast of a romantic innocent girl. She sat there pensive till all her faculties got absorbed in the dreary sense of cold and bodily discomfort, and then she rose and said her prayers, and untwisted her pretty hair and brushed it out, and went to bed, feeling as if she would have to watch through the long dark hours till morning, though the darkness and loneliness frightened her, and she dreaded the night. But Rose was asleep in half an hour, though the tears were

not dry on her eyelashes, and I think slept all the night through which she had been afraid of, and woke only when the first grey of daylight revealed the cold room and a cold morning dimly to her sight—slept longer than usual, for emotion tires the young. Poor child! she was a little ashamed of herself when she found how soundly she had slept.

“Mamma would not let me call you,” said Agatha, coming into her room; “she said you were very tired last night; but do please come down now and make haste. There is such a basket of flowers in the hall from Whitton, the man says. Where’s Whitton? Isn’t it Mr. Incledon’s place? But make haste, Rose, for breakfast, now that you are awake.”

So she had no time to think just then,

but had to hurry down stairs, where her mother met her with something of a wistful look, and kissed her with a kind of murmured half apology. "I am afraid I frightened you last night, Rose."

"Oh, no, not frightened," the girl said, taking refuge among the children, before whom certainly nothing could be said; and then Agatha and Patty surged into the conversation, and all gravity or deeper meaning was taken out of it. Indeed, her mother was so cheerful that Rose would almost have hoped she was to hear no more of it, had it not been for the cluster of flowers which stood on the table and the heaped-up bunches of beautiful purple grapes which filled a pretty Tuscan basket, and gave dignity to the bread and butter. This was a sign of the times which was

very alarming ; and I do not know why it was, unless it might be by reason of her youth, that those delicate and lovely things—fit offerings for a lover—never moved her to any thought of what it was she was rejecting, or tempted her to consider Mr. Incledon's proposal as one which involved many delightful things along with himself, who was not delightful. This idea, oddly enough, did not find any place in her mind, though she was as much subject to the influence of all that was lovely and pleasant as any girl could be.

The morning passed, however, without any further words on the subject, and her heart had begun to beat easier and her excitement to calm down, when Mrs. Damerel suddenly came to her, after the children's lessons, which was now their



mother's chief occupation. She came upon her quite unexpectedly, when Rose, moved by their noiseless presence in the room, and unable to keep her hands off them any longer, had just commenced in the course of her other arrangements (for Rose had to be a kind of upper housemaid, and make the drawing-room habitable after the rough and ready operation which Mary Jane called "tidying") to make a pretty group upon a table in the window of Mr. Inledon's flowers. Certainly they made the place look prettier and pleasanter than it had ever done yet, especially as one stray gleam of sunshine, somewhat pale, like the girl herself, but cheery, had come glancing in to light up the long, low, quaint room and caress the flowers.

"Ah, Rose, they have done you good al-

ready!" said her mother; "you look more like yourself than I have seen you for many a day."

Rose took her hands from the last flower-pot as if it had burnt her, and stood aside, so angry and vexed to have been found at this occupation that she could have cried.

"My dear," said her mother, going up to her, "I do not know that Mr. Incledon will be here to-day; but if he comes I must give him an answer. Have you reflected upon what I said to you? I need not tell you again how important it is, or how much you have in your power."

Rose clasped her hands together in self-support—one hand held fast by the other, as if that slender grasp had been something worth clinging to. "Oh! what can

"I say?" she cried; "I—told you; what more can I say?"

"You told me! Then, Rose, everything that I said to you last night goes for nothing, though you must know the truth of it far better than my words could say. Is it to be the same thing over again—always over again? Self, first and last, the only consideration? Everything to please yourself; nothing from higher motives? God forgive you, Rose!"

"Oh, hush, hush! it is unkind—it is cruel! I would die for you if that would do any good!" cried Rose.

"These are easy words to say; for dying would do no good, neither would it be asked from you," said Mrs. Damerel, impatiently.

"Rose, I do not ask this in ordinary obedience, as a mother may command a child.

It is not a child but a woman who must make such a decision; but it is my duty to show you your duty, and what is best for yourself as well as for others. No one—neither man nor woman, nor girl nor boy—can escape from duty to others; and when it is neglected some one must pay the penalty. But you—you are happier than most. You can, if you please, save your family——”

“We are not starving, mamma,” said Rose, with trembling lips; “we have enough to live upon—and I could work—I would do anything——”

“What would your work do, Rose? If you could teach—and I don’t think you could teach—you might earn enough for your own dress; that would be all. Oh, my dear! listen to me. The little work a

girl can do is nothing. She can make a sacrifice of her own inclination—of her fancy; but as for work, she has nothing in her power.”

“Then I wish there were no girls!” cried Rose, as many a poor girl has done before her, “if we can do nothing but be a burden—if there is no work for us, no use for us, but only to sell ourselves. Oh, mamma, mamma! do you know what you are asking me to do?”

“I know a great deal better than you do, or you would not repeat to me this vulgar nonsense about selling yourself. Am I likely to bid you sell yourself? Listen to me, Rose. I want you to be happy, and so you would be—nay, never shake your head at me—you would be happy with a man who loves you, for you

would learn to love him. Die for us ! I have heard such words from the lips of people who would not give up a morsel of their own will—not a whim, not an hour's comfort——”

“ But I—I am not like that,” cried Rose, stung to the heart. “ I would give up anything—everything—for the children and you !”

“ Except what you are asked to give up ; except the only thing which you can give up. Again I say, Rose, I have known such cases. They are not rare in this world.”

“ Oh, mamma, mamma !” .

“ You think I am cruel. If you knew my life, you would not think so ; you would understand my fear and horror of this amiable self-seeking which looks so natural. Rose,” said her mother, dropping into a

softer tone, "I have something more to say to you—perhaps something that will weigh more with you than anything I can say. Your father had set his heart on this. He spoke to me of it on his death-bed. God knows! perhaps he saw then what a dreary struggle I should have, and how little had been done to help us through. One of the last things he said to me was, 'Incedon will look after the boys.'"

"Papa said that?" said Rose, putting out her hands to find a prop. Her limbs seemed to refuse to support her. She was unprepared for this new unseen antagonist. "Papa? How did he know?"

The mother was trembling and pale, too, overwhelmed by the recollection as well as by her anxiety to conquer. She made no direct answer to Rose's question, but took

her hand within both of hers, and continued with her eyes full of tears: "You would like to please *him*, Rose—it was almost the last thing he said—to please him, and to rescue me from anxieties I can see no end to, and to secure Bertie's future. Oh, Rose! you should thank God that you can do so much for those you love. And you would be happy, too. You are young, and love begets love. He would do everything that man could do to please you. He is a good man, with a kind heart; you would get to love him; and, my dear, you would be happy too."

"Mamma," said Rose, with her head bent down and some silent tears dropping upon Mr. Incledon's flowers—a flush of colour came over her downcast face, and then it grew pale again; her voice sounded



so low that her mother stooped towards her to hear what she said—"mamma! I should like to tell you something—"

Mrs. Damerel made an involuntary movement—a slight instinctive withdrawal from the confidence. Did she guess what it was? If she did so, she made up her mind at the same time not to know it. "What is it, dear?" she said, tenderly, but quickly. "Oh, Rose! do you think I don't understand your objections? But, my darling, surely you may trust your mother, who loves you more than all the world. You will not reject it—I know you will not reject it. There is no blessing that is not promised to those that deny themselves. He will not hurry nor press you, dear. Rose, say I may give him a kind answer when he comes?"

Rose's head was swimming, her heart throbbing in her ears and her throat. The girl was not equal to such a strain. To have the living and the dead both uniting against her—both appealing to her in the sacred names of love and duty against love—was more than she could bear. She had sunk into the nearest chair, unable to stand, and she no longer felt strong enough, even had her mother been willing to hear it, to make that confession which had been on her lips. At what seemed to her the extremity of human endurance she suddenly saw one last resource in which she might still find safety, and grasped at it, scarcely aware what she did. "May I see Mr. Incledon myself if he comes?" she gasped, almost under her breath.

"Surely, dear," said her mother, sur-

prised; “of course that would be the best;—if you are able for it, if you will think well before you decide, if you will promise to do nothing hastily. Oh, Rose! do not break my heart!”

“It is more likely to be my own that I will break,” said the girl, with a shadow of a smile passing over her face. “Mamma, will you be very kind, and say no more? I will think, think—everything that you say; but let me speak to him myself, if he comes.”

Mrs. Damerel looked at her very earnestly, half suspicious, half sympathetic. She went up to her softly and put her arms round her, and pressed the girl’s drooping head against her breast. “God bless you, my darling!” she said, with her eyes full of tears; and, kissing her hastily, went

out of the room, leaving Rose alone with her thoughts.

If I were to tell you what these thoughts were, and all the confusion of them, I should require a year to do it. Rose had no heart to stand up and fight for herself all alone against the world. Her young frame ached and trembled from head to foot with the unwonted strain. If there had been indeed any one—any one—to struggle for ; but how was she to stand alone and battle for herself ? Everything combined against her—every motive, every influence. She sat in a vague trance of pain, and, instead of thinking over what had been said, only saw visions gleaming before her of the love which was a vision, nothing more, and which she was called upon to resign. A vision !—that was all ; a dream,

perhaps, without any foundation. It seemed to disperse like a mist, as the world melted and dissolved around her—the world which she had known—showing a new world, a dreamy, undiscovered country, forming out of darker vapours before her.

She sat thus till the stir of the children in the house warned her that they had come in from their daily walk to the early dinner. She listened to their voices and noisy steps and laughter with the strangest feeling that she was herself a dreamer, having nothing in common with the fresh real life, where all the voices rang out so clearly, where people said what they meant with spontaneous outcries and laughter, and there was no concealed meaning and nothing beneath the sunny

surface ; but when she heard her mother's softer tones speaking to the children, Rose got up hurriedly, and fled to the shelter of her room. If anything more were said to her, she thought she must die. Happily Mrs. Damerel did not know that it was her voice, and not the noise of the children, which was too much for poor Rose's overstrained nerves. She sent word by Agatha that Rose must lie down for an hour and try to rest, and that quiet was the best thing for her headache, which, of course, was the plea the girl put forth to excuse her flight and seclusion. Agatha, for her part, was very sorry and distressed that Rose should miss her dinner, and wanted much to bring something upstairs for her, which was at once the kindest and most practical suggestion of all.

The bustle of dinner was all over and the house still again in the dreary afternoon, when Agatha once more, with many precautions, stole into the room.

“Are you awake?” she said. “I hope your head is better. Mr. Incledon is in the drawing-room, and mamma says, please, if you are better, will you go down, for she is busy; and you are to thank him for the grapes and for the flowers. What does Mr. Incledon want, coming so often? He was here only yesterday, and sat for hours with mamma. Oh! what a ghost you look, Rose! Shall I bring you some tea?”

“It is too early for tea. Never mind; my head is better.”

“But you have had no dinner,” said

practical Agatha ; “ it is not much wonder that you are pale.”

Rose did not know what she answered, or if she said anything. Her head seemed to swim more than ever. Not only was it all true about Mr. Incledon, but she was going to talk to him, to decide her own fate finally one way or other. What a good thing that the drawing-room was so dark in the afternoon, that he could not remark how woebegone she looked, how miserable and pale !

He got up when she came in, and went up to her eagerly, putting out his hands. I suppose he took her appearance as a proof that his suit was progressing well ; and, indeed, he had come to-day with the determination to see Rose, whatever might happen. He took her hand into both of



his, and for one second pressed it fervently and close.

“It is very kind of you to see me. How can I thank you for giving me this opportunity?” he said.

“Oh, no ! not kind—I wished it,” said Rose, breathlessly, withdrawing her hand as hastily as he had taken it ; and then, fearing her strength, she sat down in the nearest chair, and said, falteringly, “Mr. Incledon, I wanted very much to speak to you myself.”

“And I, too,” he said ; her simplicity and eagerness thus opened the way for him, and saved him all embarrassment—  
“I, too, was most anxious to see you. I did not venture to speak of this yesterday, when I met you. I was afraid to frighten and distress you ; but I have wished ever

since that I had dared——”

“Oh, please do not speak so!” she cried. In his presence Rose felt so young and childish, it seemed impossible to believe in the extraordinary change of positions which his words implied.

“But I must speak so. Miss Damerel, I am very conscious of my deficiencies by your side—of the disparity between us in point of age, and in many other ways; you so fresh and untouched by the world, I affected by it, as every man is more or less; but if you will commit your happiness to my hands, don’t think, because I am not so young as you, that I will watch over it less carefully—that it will be less precious in my eyes.”

“Ah! I was not thinking of my happiness,” said Rose; “I suppose I have no

more right to be happy than other people—but oh ! if you would let me speak to you ! Mr. Incledon, oh ! why should you want *me* ? There are so many girls better, more like you, that would be glad. Oh ! what is there in me ? I am silly ; I am not well educated, though you may think so. I am not clever enough to be a companion you would care for. I think it is because you don't know."

Mr. Incledon was so much taken by surprise, that he could do nothing but laugh faintly at this strange address.

"I was not thinking either of education or of wisdom, but of you—only you," he said.

"But you know so little about me ; you think I must be nice because of papa ; but papa himself was never satisfied with me.

I have not read very much. I know very little. I am not good for anywhere but home. Mr. Incledon, I am sure you are deceived in me. This is what I wanted to say. Mamma does not see it in the same light; but I feel sure that you are deceived, and take me for something very different from what I am," said Rose, totally unconscious that every word she said made Mr. Incledon more and more sure that he had done the very thing he ought to have done, and that he was not deceived.

"Indeed, you mistake me altogether," he said. "It is not merely because you are a piece of excellence—it is because I love you, Rose."

"Love me! Do you love me?" she said, looking at him with wondering eyes;

then drooping with a deep blush under his gaze—"but I—do not love you."

"I did not expect it; it would have been too much to expect; but if you will let me love you, and show you how I love you, dear!" said Mr. Incledon, going up to her softly, with something of the tenderness of a father to a child, subduing the eagerness of a lover. "I don't want to frighten you; I will not hurry nor tease; but some time you might learn to love me, too."

"That is what mamma says," said Rose, with a heavy sigh.

Now this was scarcely flattering to a lover. Mr. Incledon felt for the moment as if he had received a downright and tolerably heavy blow; but he was in earnest, and prepared to meet with a rebuff or two.

“She says truly,” he answered, with much gravity. “Rose—may I call you Rose?—do not think I will persecute or pain you; only do not reject me hastily. What I have to say for myself is very simple. I love you—that is all; and I will put up with all a man may for the chance of winning you, when you know me better, to love me in return.”

These were almost the same words as those Mrs. Damerel had employed; but how differently they sounded! They had not touched Rose’s heart at all before; but they did now, with a curious mixture of agitation and terror, and almost pleasure. She was sorry for him, more than she could have thought possible, and somehow felt more confidence in him, and freedom to tell him what was in her heart.

“Do not answer me now, unless you please,” said Mr. Incledon. “If you will give me the right to think your family mine, I know I can be of use to them. The boys would become my charge, and there is much that has been lost which I could make up, had I the right to speak to your mother as a son. It is absurd, I know,” he said, with a half smile; “I am about as old as she is; but all these are secondary questions. The main thing is you. Dear Rose, dear child, you don’t know what love is——”

“Ah!” the girl looked up at him suddenly, her countenance changing. “Mr. Incledon, I have not said all to you that I wanted to say. Oh, do not ask me any more! Tell mamma that you have given it up; or I must tell you something that will break my heart.”

“I will not give it up so long as there is any hope,” he said. “Tell me—what is it? I will do nothing to break your heart.”

She made a pause. It was hard to say it, and yet, perhaps, easier to him than it would be to face her mother, and make this tremendous confession. She twisted her poor little fingers together in her bewilderment and misery, and fixed her eyes upon them as if their interlacing were the chief matter in hand.

“Mr. Incledon,” she said, very low, “there was some one else—oh, how can I say it!—some one—whom I cared for—whom I can’t help thinking about.”

“Tell me,” said Mr. Incledon, bravely quenching in his own mind a not very amiable sentiment; for it seemed to him



that if he could but secure her confidence all would be well. He took her hand with caressing gentleness, and spoke low, almost as low as she did. "Tell me, my darling; I am your friend, confide in me. Who was it? May I know?"

"I cannot tell you who it was," said Rose, with her eyes still cast down, "because he has never said anything to me—perhaps he does not care for me; but this has happened: without his ever asking me, or perhaps wishing it, I cared for him. I know a girl should not do so, and that is why I cannot—cannot! But," said Rose, raising her head with more confidence, though still reluctant to meet his eye, "now that you know this, you will not think of me any more, Mr. Incledon. I am so sorry if it makes you at all unhappy;

but I am of very little consequence—you cannot be long unhappy about me.”

“Pardon me if I see it in quite a different light,” he said. “My mind is not at all changed. This is but a fancy. Surely a man who loves you and says so, should be of more weight than one of whose feelings you know nothing.”

“I know about my own,” said Rose, with a little sigh; “and, oh! don’t think, as mamma does, that I am selfish! It is not selfishness; it is because I know, if you saw into my heart, you would not ask me. Oh! Mr. Incledon, I would die for them all, if I could; but how could I say one thing to you, and mean another? How could I let you be deceived?”

“Then, Rose, answer me truly; is your consideration solely for me?”

She gave him an alarmed, appealing look, but did not reply.

"I am willing to run the risk," he said, with a smile, "if all your fear is for me; and I think you might run the risk too. The other is an imagination; I am real, very real," he added, "very constant, very patient. So long as you do not refuse me absolutely, I will wait and hope."

Poor Rose, all her little arts were exhausted. She dared not, with her mother's words ringing in her ears, and with all the consequences so clearly before her, refuse him absolutely, as he said. She had appealed to him to withdraw, and he would not withdraw. She looked at him as if he were the embodiment of Fate, against which no man can strive.

"Mr. Incledon," she said, gravely and

calmly, "you would not marry anyone who did not love you?"

"I will marry you, Rose, if you will have me, whether you love me or not," he said. "I will wait for the love, and hope."

"Oh, be kind!" she said, driven to her wits' end. "You are free, you can do what you please; and there are so many girls in the world besides me. And I cannot do what I please," she added, low, with a piteous tone, looking at him. Perhaps he did not hear these last words. He turned from her with I know not what mingling of love, and impatience, and wounded pride, and walked up and down the darkling room, making an effort to command himself. She thought she had moved him at last, and sat with her hands clasped together, expecting the words which would be de-

liverance to her. It was almost dark, and the firelight glimmered through the low room, and the dim green glimmer of the twilight crossed its ruddy rays, not more unlike than the two who thus stood so strangely opposed to each other. At last Mr. Incledon returned to where Rose sat in the shadow, touched by neither one illumination nor the other, and eagerly watching him as he approached her through the uncertain gleams of the ruddy light.

“There is but one girl in the world for me,” he said, somewhat hoarsely. “I do not pretend to judge for anyone but myself. So long as you do not reject me I will hope.”

And thus their interview closed.

When he had got over the disagreeable shock of encountering that indifference on

the part of the woman he loves, which is the greatest blow that can be given to a man's vanity, Mr. Incledon was not at all downhearted about the result. He went away with half-a-dozen words to Mrs. Damerel, begging her not to press his suit, but to let the matter take its course.

"All will go well if we are patient," he said, with a composure which, perhaps, surprised her; for women are apt to prefer the hot-headed in such points, and Mrs. Damerel did not reflect that, having waited so long, it was not so hard on the middle-aged lover to wait a little longer.

But his forbearance, at least, was of immediate service to Rose, who was allowed time to recover herself after her agitation, and had no more exciting appeals addressed to her for some time. But Mr.

Incedon went and came, and a soft, continued pressure, which no one could take decided objection to, began gradually to make itself felt in the White House.

## CHAPTER II.

MR. INCLEDON went and came; he did not accept his dismissal, nor, indeed, had any dismissal been given to him. A young lover, like Edward Wodehouse, would have been at once crushed and rendered furious by the appeal Rose had made so ineffectually to the man of experience, who knew what he was about. If she was worth having at all she was worth a struggle; and Mr. Incledon, in the calm exercise of his judgment, knew that, at the last, every good thing falls



into the arms of the patient man who can wait. He had not much difficulty in penetrating the thin veil which she had cast over the "some one" for whom she cared, but who, so far as she knew, did not care for her. It could be but one person, and the elderly lover was glad beyond description to know that his rival had not spoken, and that he was absent, and likely to be absent. Edward Wodehouse being thus disposed of, there was no one else in Mr. Incledon's way, and with but a little patience he was sure to win.

As for Rose, though she felt that her appeal had been unsuccessful—she, too, was less discouraged by it than she could have herself supposed. In the first place she was let alone; nothing was pressed upon her; she had time allowed her to calm down, and

with time everything was possible. Some miracle would happen to save her ; or, if not a miracle, some ordinary turn of affairs would take the shape of miracle, and answer the same purpose.

What is Providence but a divine agency to get us out of trouble, to restore happiness, to make things pleasant for us ?—so, at least, one thinks when one is young ; older, we begin to learn that Providence has to watch over many whose interests are counter to ours as well as our own ; but at twenty, all that is good and necessary in life seems always on our side, and there seems no choice for Heaven but to clear the obstacles out of our way.

Something would happen and all would be well again ; and Rose's benevolent fancy even exercised itself in finding for " poor

Mr. Incledon " someone who would suit him better than herself. He was very wary, very judicious, in his treatment of her. He ignored that one scene when he had refused to give up his proposal, and conducted himself for some time as if he had sincerely given it up, and was no more than the family friend, the most kind and sympathising of neighbours.

It was only by the slowest degrees that Rose found out that he had given up nothing, that his constant visits and constant attentions were so many meshes of the net in which her simple feet were being caught. For the first few weeks, as I have said, she was relieved altogether from everything that looked like persecution. She heard of him, indeed, constantly, but only in the pleasantest way.

Fresh flowers came, filling the dim old rooms with brightness; and the gardener from Whitton came to look after the flowers and to suggest to Mrs. Damerel improvements in her garden, and how to turn the hall, which was large in proportion to the house, into a kind of conservatory; and baskets of fruit came, over which the children rejoiced; and Mr. Incledon himself came, and talked to Mrs. Damerel and played with them, and left books—new books all fragrant from the printing—of which he sometimes asked Rose's opinion casually.

None of all these good things was for her, and yet she had the unexpressed consciousness, which was pleasant enough so long as no one else remarked it and no recompense was asked, that but for her,

those pleasant additions to the family life would not have been. Then it was extraordinary how often he would meet them by accident in their walks, and how much trouble he would take to adapt his conversation to theirs, finding out (but this Rose did not discover till long after) all her tastes and likings.

I suppose that, having once made up his mind to take so much trouble, the pursuit of this shy creature, who would only betray what was in her by intervals, who shut herself up like the mimosa whenever she was too boldly touched, but who opened secretly with an almost child-like confidence when her fears were lulled to rest, became more interesting to Mr. Incedon than a more ordinary wooing, with a straightforward "Yes" to his proposal

at the end of it, would have been. His vanity got many wounds, both by Rose's unconsciousness and by her shrinking, but he pursued his plan undaunted by either, having made up his mind to win her and no other; and the more difficult the fight was, the more triumphant would be the success.

This state of affairs lasted for some time; indeed, everything went on quietly, with no apparent break in the gentle monotony of existence at the White House, until the spring was so far advanced as to have pranked itself out in a flood of primroses. It was something quite insignificant and incidental which for the first time reawakened Rose's fears. He had looked at her with something in his eyes which betrayed him, or some word had dropped

from his lips which startled her; but the first direct attack upon her peace of mind did not come from Mr. Incedon. It came from two ladies on the Green, one of whom at least was very innocent of evil meaning.

Rose was walking with her mother on an April afternoon, when they met Mrs. Wodehouse and Mrs. Musgrove, likewise taking their afternoon walk. Mrs. Musgrove was a very quiet person, who interfered with nobody, yet who was mixed up with everything that went on on the Green, by right of being the most sympathetic of souls, ready to hear everybody's grievance and to help in everybody's trouble. Mrs. Wodehouse struck straight across the Green to meet Mrs. Damerel and Rose, when she saw them, so that it was by no ordinary chance meeting, but an encounter sought

eagerly on one side at least, that this revelation came. Mrs. Wodehouse was full of her subject, vibrating with it to the very flowers on her bonnet, which thrilled and nodded against the blue distance like a soldier's plumes. She came forward with a forced exuberance of cordiality, holding out both her hands.

"Now tell me!" she said; "may we congratulate you? Is the embargo removed? Quantities of people have assured me that we need not hold our tongues any longer, but that it is all settled at last."

"What is all settled at last?" asked Mrs. Damerel, with sudden stiffness and coldness. "I beg your pardon, but I really don't in the least know what you mean."

"I said I was afraid you were too hasty," said Mrs. Musgrove.



“Well, if one can’t believe the evidence of one’s senses, what is one to believe?” cried Mrs. Wodehouse. “It is not kind, Rose, to keep all your old friends so long in suspense. Of course, it is very easy to see on which side the hesitation is ; and I am sure I am very sorry if I have been premature.”

“You are more than premature,” said Mrs. Damerel, with a little laugh, and an uneasy colour on her cheek, “for you are speaking a language neither Rose nor I understand. I hope, Mrs. Wodehouse, you have good news from your son.”

“Oh, very good news indeed !” said the mother, whose indignation on her son’s behalf made the rose on her bonnet quiver : and then there were a few further interchanges of volleys in the shape of questions

and answers of the most civil description, and the ladies shook hands and parted. Rose had been struck dumb altogether by the dialogue, in which, trembling and speechless, she had taken no part. When they had gone on for a few yards in silence, she broke down in her effort at self-restraint.

“Mamma, what does she mean?”

“Oh, Rose, do not drive me wild with your folly!” said Mrs. Damerel. “What could she mean but one thing? If you think for one moment, you will have no difficulty in understanding what she means.”

Rose woke up, as a sick man wakes after a narcotic, feverish and trembling. “I thought,” she said, slowly, her heart beginning to throb, and her head to ache in

a moment—"I thought it was all given up."

"How could you think anything so foolish? What symptom can you see of its having been given up? Has he ceased coming? Has he ceased trying to please you, ungrateful girl that you are? Indeed you go too far for ordinary patience; for it cannot be stupidity—you are not stupid," said Mrs. Damerel, excitedly; "you have not even that excuse."

"Oh, mamma, do not be angry!" said poor Rose; "I thought—it seemed so natural that, as he saw more of me, he would give it up. Why should he care for me? I am not like him, nor fit to be a great lady; he must see that."

"This is false humility, and it is very ill-timed," said Mrs. Damerel. "Strange

though it may seem, seeing more of you does not make him give it up; and if you are too simple or too foolish to see how much he is devoted to you, no one else is. Mrs. Wodehouse had a spiteful meaning, but she is not the first who has spoken to me. All our friends on the Green believe, like her, that everything is settled between you; that it is only some hesitation about—about our recent sorrow, which keeps it from being announced.”

Rose turned upon her mother for the first time with reproach in her eyes. “You should have told me!” she said, with momentary passion; “you ought to have told me,—for how was I to know?”

“Rose, I will not allow such questions; you are not a fool nor a child. Did you think Mr. Incledon came for me? or

Agatha, perhaps? He told you he would not give you up. You were warned what his object was—more than warned. Was I to defeat my own wishes by keeping you constantly on your guard? You knew what he wanted, and you have encouraged him, and accepted his attentions.”

“I—encouraged him?”

“Whenever a girl permits, she encourages,” said Mrs. Damerel, with oracular solemnity. “In matters of this kind, Rose, if you do not refuse at once, you commit yourself, and sooner or later you must accept.”

“You never told me so before. Oh, mamma! how was I to know? you never said this to me before.”

“There are things that one knows by intuition,” said Mrs. Damerel; “and, Rose,

you know what my opinion has been all along. You have no right to refuse. On the one side, there is everything that heart can desire; on the other, nothing but a foolish, childish disinclination. I don't know if it goes so far as disinclination; you seem now to like him well enough."

"Do you not know the difference?" said Rose, turning wistful eyes upon her mother. "Oh, mamma, you who ought to know so much better than I do! I *like* him very well—what does that matter?"

"It matters everything; liking is the first step to love. You can have no reason, absolutely no reason, for refusing him if you like him. Rose, oh, how foolish this is, and what a small, what a very small, place there seems to be in your mind for the thought of duty! You tell us you are

ready to die for us—which is absurd—and yet you cannot make up your mind to this?”

“It is different,” said Rose; “oh! it is different! Mamma, listen a moment: you are a great deal better than I am; you love us better than we love each other; you are never tired of doing things for us; whether you are well or whether you are ill it does not matter; you are always ready when the children want you. I am not blind,” said the girl, with tears. “I know all you do and all you put up with; but, mamma, you who are good, you who know how to deny yourself, would *you* do this?”

“Rose!”

“Would you do it?” cried Rose, excited and breathless, pursuing her advantage.

Mrs. Damerel was not old, nor was life

quenched in her either by her years or her sorrows. Her face flushed under her heavy widow's veil, all over, with a violent overwhelming blush like a girl's.

"Rose," she said passionately, "how dare you—how dare you put such a question to your mother? I do it!—either you are heartless altogether, or you are mad, and don't know what you say."

"Forgive me, mamma; but, oh, let me speak! There is nothing else so hard, nothing so disagreeable, but you would do it for us; but you would not do this. There is a difference, then?—you do not deny it now?"

"You use a cruel argument," said Mrs. Damerel, the blush still warm upon her matron cheek, "and it is not a true one. I am your father's wife. I am your mo-



ther and Bertie's, who are almost man and woman. All my life would be reversed, all my relations confused, if I were to make such a sacrifice; besides, it is impossible," she said, suddenly; "I did not think that a child of mine would ever have so insulted me."

"I do not mean it for insult, mamma. Oh, forgive me! I want you only to see the difference. It is not like anything else. You would do anything else, and so would I; but, oh, not this! You see it yourself—not this, mamma."

"It is foolish to attempt to argue with you," said Mrs. Damerel; and she hurried in and upstairs to her room, leaving Rose, not less excited, to follow. Rose had scarcely calculated upon the prodigious force of her own argument. She was half

frightened by it, and half ashamed of having used it, yet to some extent triumphant in her success. There was quite a bank of flowers in the hall as she passed through—flowers which she stopped to look at and caress, with little touches of fondness as flower-lovers use, before she recollected that they were Mr. Incledon's flowers. She took up a book which was on the hall-table, and hurried on to avoid that contemplation, and then she remembered that it was Mr. Incledon's book. She was just entering the drawing-room as she did so, and threw it down pettishly on a chair by the door; and, lo! Mr. Incledon himself rose, a tall shadow against the window, where he had been waiting for the ladies' return.

“Mamma has gone upstairs; I will call

her," said Rose, with confusion, turning away.

"Nay, never mind; it is a pity to disturb Mrs. Damerel; and it is long, very long, since you have allowed me a chance of talking to you."

"Indeed, we see each other very often," said Rose, falteringly.

"Yes, I see you in a crowd, protected by the children, or with your mother, who is my friend, but who cannot help me;—I wanted to ask about the book you threw down so impatiently as you came in. Don't you like it?" said Mr. Incledon, with a smile.

What a relief it was! She was so grateful to him for not making love to her, that I almost think she would have consented to marry him had he asked her before he

left that evening. But he was very cautious and very wise, and, though he had come with no other intention, he was warned by the excitement in her looks, and stopped the very words on his lips, for which Rose, shortsighted, like all mortals, was very thankful to him, not knowing how much the distinct refusal, which it was in her heart to give, would have simplified all their affairs.

This, however, was at once the first and last of Rose's successes. When she saw traces of tears about her mother's eyes, and how pale she was, her heart smote her, and she made abject submission of herself, and poured out her very soul in excuses, so that Mrs. Damerel, though vanquished for the moment, took higher ground after it. The mother, indeed, was so much

shaken by the practical application of her doctrines, that she felt there was no longer time for the gradual undermining which was Mr. Incledon's policy.

Mrs. Damerel did not know what reply she could make if Rose repeated her novel and strenuous argument, and felt that now safety lay in as rapid a conclusion of the matter as possible ; so that from this moment every day saw the closing of the net over poor Rose. The lover became more close in his attendance, the mother more urgent in her appeals ; but so cleverly did he manage the matter that his society was always a relief to the girl when hard driven, and she gradually got to feel herself safer with him, which was a great deal in his favour.

Everything, however, went against Rose.

The ladies on the Green made gentle criticisms upon her, and called her a sly little puss. Some hoped she would not forget her humble friends when she came into her kingdom; some asked her what she meant by dragging her captive so long at her chariot wheels; and the captive himself, though a miracle of goodness, would cast pathetic looks at her, and make little speeches full of meaning. Rose began to feel herself like a creature at bay; wherever she turned she could see no way of escape; even sharp-eyed Agatha, in the wisdom of fifteen, turned against her.

“Why don’t you marry Mr. Incledon, and have done with it?” said Agatha. “I would if I were you. What a good thing it would be for you! and I suppose he would be kind to the rest of us too. Why,

you would have your carriage, two or three carriages, and a horse to ride, and you might go abroad if you liked, or do anything you liked. How I should like to have quantities of money, and a beautiful house, and everything in the world I wanted ! I should not shilly-shally like you."

"No one has everything in the world they want," said Rose, solemnly, thinking also ; if Mr. Incledon had been "some one else" how much easier her decision would have been.

"You seem to think they do," said Agatha, "or you would not make such a fuss about Mr. Incledon. Why, what do you object to ? I suppose it's because he is not young enough. I think he is a very nice man, and very good-looking. I only wish he had asked me."

“Agatha, you are too young to talk of such things,” said Rose, with the dignity of her seniority.

“Then I wish my eldest sister was too young to put them into my head,” said Agatha.

This conversation drove Rose from her last place of safety, the school-room, where hitherto she had been left in quiet. A kind of despair seized her. She dared not encounter her mother in the drawing-room, where probably Mr. Incledon also would appear towards the twilight. She put on her hat and wandered out, her heart full of a subdued anguish, poignant yet not unsweet, for the sense of intense suffering is in its way a kind of excitement and painful enjoyment to the very young. It was a spring afternoon, soft and sweet, full of



promise of the summer, and Rose, quite unused to walking, or indeed doing anything else, alone, found a certain pleasure in the loneliness and silence. How tranquilising it was to be alone ; to have no one near who could say anything to disturb her ; nobody with reproachful eyes ; nothing around or about but the soft sky, the trees growing green, the grass which waved its thin blades in the soft air ! It seemed to Rose that she was out for a long time, and that the silence refreshed her, and made her strong for her fate whatever it might be. Before she returned home she went in at the old familiar gate of the Rectory, and skirted the lawn by a by-path she knew well, and stole down the slope to the little platform under the old May-tree.

By this time it had begun to get dark ;

and as Rose looked across the soft undulations of the half visible country, every line of which was dear and well known to her, her eyes fell suddenly upon a gleam of light from among the trees. What friendly sprite had lighted the lights so early in the parlour of the cottage at Ankermead I cannot tell, but they glimmered out from the brown clump of trees, and took Rose so by surprise that her eyes filled with sudden moisture, and her heart beat with a muffled throbbing in her ears. So well she recollected the warm summer evening long ago (and yet it was not a year ago), and every word that was said. "Imagination will play me many a prank before I forget this night!" Did he mean that? had he forgotten it? or was he perhaps leaning over the ship's side somewhere while the

big vessel rustled through the soft broad sea, thinking of home, as he had said, seeing the lights upon the coast, and dreaming of his mother's lighted windows, and of that dim, dreamy, hazy landscape, so soft and far inland, with the cottage lamp shining out from that brown clump of trees?

The tears fell softly from Rose's eyes through the evening dimness which hid them almost from herself; she was very sad, heartbroken—and yet not so miserable as she thought. She did not know how long she sat there, looking at the cottage lights through her tears. The new Rector and his wife sat down to dinner all unaware of the forlorn young visitor who had stolen into the domain which was now theirs, and Rose's mother began to get sadly uneasy about her absence,

with a chill dread lest she should have pressed her too far, and driven her to some scheme of desperation. Mr. Incledon came out to look for her, and met her just outside the Rectory gate, and was very kind to her, making her take his arm and leading her gently home without asking a question.

“She has been calling at the Rectory, and I fear it was too much for her,” he said; an explanation which made the quick tears start to Mrs. Damerel’s own eyes, who kissed her daughter and sent her upstairs without further question. I almost think Mr. Incledon was clever enough to guess the true state of affairs; but he told this fib with an admirable air of believing it, and made Rose grateful to the very bottom of her heart.

Gratitude is a fine sentiment to cultivate in such circumstances. It is a better and safer beginning than that pity which is said to be akin to love. Rose struggled no more after this. She surrendered quietly, made no further resistance, and finally yielded a submissive assent to what was asked of her. She became "engaged" to Mr. Incledon, and the engagement was formally announced, and all the Green joined in with congratulations, except, indeed, Mrs. Wodehouse, who called in a marked manner just after the ladies had been seen to go out, and left a huge card, which was all her contribution to the felicitations of the neighbourhood. There was scarcely a lady in the parish except this one, however, who did not take the trouble to walk or drive to the White House and kiss

Rose and congratulate her mother. "Such a very excellent match—everything that a mother could desire!" they said. "But you must get a little more colour in your cheeks, my dear," said old Lady Denvil. "This is not like the dear Rector's Rose in June. It is more like a pale China rose in November."

What could Rose do but cry at this allusion? It was kind of the old lady (who was always kind) to give her this excellent reason and excuse for the tears in her eyes.

And then there came, with a strange, hollow, far-off sound, proposals of dates and days to be fixed, and talk about the wedding-dresses and the wedding-tour. She listened to it all with an inward shiver; but, fortunately for Rose, Mrs. Damerel

would hear of no wedding until after the anniversary of her husband's death, which had taken place in July. The Green discussed the subject largely, and most people blamed her for standing on this punctilio ; for society in general, with a wise sense of the uncertainty of all human affairs, has a prejudice against the postponement of marriages, which it never believes in thoroughly till they have taken place. They thought it ridiculous in a woman of Mrs. Damerel's sense, and one, too, who ought to know how many slips there are between the cup and the lip ; but Mr. Incledon did not seem to object, and of course, everybody said, no one else had a right to interfere.

All this took place in April, when the Damerels had been but three months in

their new house. Even that little time had proved bitterly to them many of the evils of their impoverished condition, for already Mr. Hunsdon had begun to write of the long time Bertie had been at school, and the necessity there was that he should exert himself; and even Reginald's godfather, who had always been so good, showed signs of a disposition to launch his charge, too, on the world, suggesting that perhaps it might be better, as he had now no prospect of anything but working for himself, that he should leave Eton. Mrs. Damerel kept these humiliations to herself, but it was only natural that they should give fire to her words in her arguments with Rose; and it could not be denied that the family had spent more than their income permitted in the first three months.



There had been the mourning, and the removal, and so many other expenses, to begin with. It is hard enough to struggle with bills as Mrs. Damerel had done in her husband's lifetime, when, by means of the wisest art and never-failing attention, it was always possible to pay them as they became urgent; but when there is no money at all, either present or in prospect, what is a poor woman to do? They made her sick many a time when she opened the drawer in her desk and looked at them. Even with all she could accept from Mr. Incledon (and that was limited by pride and delicacy in many ways), and with one less to provide for, Mrs. Damerel would still have care sufficient to make her cup run over. Rose's good fortune did not take her burden away.

Thus things went on through the early summer. The thought of Rose's trousseau nearly broke her mother's heart. It must be to some degree in consonance with her future position, and it must not come from Mr. Incledon; and where was it to come from? Mrs. Damerel had begun to write a letter to her brother, appealing, which it was a bitter thing to do, for his help, one evening early in May. She had written after all her children had left her, when she was alone in the old-fashioned room, where all the old walls and the old stairs uttered strange creaks and jars in the midnight stillness, and the branches of the creepers tapped ghostly taps against the window. Her nerves were overstrained, and her heart was sore, notwithstanding her success in the one matter which she

had struggled for so earnestly; and after writing half her letter, Mrs. Damerel had given it up, with a strange feeling that something opposed the writing of it, some influence which she could not define, which seemed to stop her words, and made her incapable of framing a sentence. She gave it up with almost a superstitious thrill of feeling, and a nervous tremor which she tried in vain to master; and, leaving it half-written in her blotting-book, stole upstairs to bed in the silence, as glad to get out of the echoing, creaking room as if it had been haunted. Rose heard her come upstairs, and thought, with a little bitterness, as she lay awake, her pillow wet with the tears which she never shed in the daylight, of her mother's triumph over her, and how all this revolution was her

work. She heard something like a sigh as her mother passed her door, and wondered, almost contemptuously, what she could have to sigh about, for Rose felt all the other burdens in the world to be as nothing in comparison with her burden—as, indeed, we all do.

Next morning, however, before Rose was awake, Mrs. Damerel came into her room in her dressing-gown, with her hair, which was still so pretty, curling about her shoulders, and her face lit up with a wonderful pale illumination, like a northern sky.

“What is it?” cried Rose, springing up from her bed.

“Rose,” said Mrs. Damerel, gasping for breath, “we are rich again! Yes! it is impossible!—but it is true; here it is in

this letter—my Uncle Edward is dead, and he has left us all his money. We are richer than ever I was in all my life !”

Rose got up, and ran and kissed her mother, and cried, with a great cry that rang all over the house :

“ Then I am free !”

## CHAPTER III.

THERE is no such picturesque incident in life as those sudden changes of fortune which make a complete revolution in the fate of families or individuals, without either action or merit of their own. That which we are most familiar with is the change from comfort to poverty, which so often takes place, as it had done with the Damerels, when the head of the house, either incautious or unfortunate, goes out of this world, leaving, not only sorrow, but misery, behind him, and the bereavement is intensified by social downfall, and all

the trials that accompany loss of means.

But for the prospect of Mr. Incledon's backing up, this would have implied a total change in the prospects and condition of the entire household, for all hope of higher education must have been given up for the boys ; they must have dropped into any poor occupation which happened to be within their reach, with gratitude that they were able to maintain themselves ; and as for the girls, what could they do, poor children ! unless by some lucky chance of marriage ? This poor hope would have given them one remaining chance not possible to their brothers ; but, except that, what had they all to look forward to ?

This was Mrs. Damerel's excuse for urging Rose's unwilling consent to Mr. Incledon's proposal. But lo ! all this was

changed as by a magician's wand. The clouds rolled off the sky, the sunshine came out again, the family recovered its prospects, its hopes, its position, its freedom—and all this in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

Mrs. Damerel's old uncle, Edward, had been an original, who had quarrelled with all his family. She had not seen him since she was a child, and none of her children had seen him at all—and she never knew exactly what it was that made him select her for his heir. Probably it was pity; probably admiration for the brave stand she was making against poverty—perhaps only caprice, or because she had never asked anything from him; but, whatever the cause was, here was the happy result. In the evening anxiety, care, discourage-



ment, bitter humiliation, and pain; in the morning sudden ease, comfort, happiness—for, in the absence of anything better, it is a great happiness to have money enough for all your needs, and to be able to give your children what they want, and pay your bills, and owe no man anything. In the thought of being rich enough to do all this, Mrs. Damerel's heart leapt up in her breast, like the heart of a child. Next moment she remembered, and with a pang of sudden anguish asked herself, oh! why—why had not this come sooner, when *he*, who would have enjoyed it so much, might have had the enjoyment? This feeling sprang up by instinct in her mind, notwithstanding her bitter consciousness of all she had suffered from her husband's carelessness and self-regard—for love is the

strangest of all sentiments, and can indulge and condemn in a breath, without any sense of inconsistency.

This was the pervading thought in Mrs. Damerel's mind, as the news spread through the awakened house, making even the children giddy with hopes of they knew not what. How *he* would have enjoyed it all—the added luxury, the added consequence!—far more than she would enjoy it, notwithstanding that it came to her like life to the dying. She had taken no notice of Rose's exclamation, nor of the flush of joy which the girl betrayed. I am not sure, indeed, that she observed them, being absorbed in her own feelings, which come first, even in the most generous minds, at such a crisis and revolution of fate.

As for Rose, it was the very giddiness

of delight that she felt, unreasoning, and even unfeeling. Her sacrifice had become unnecessary—she was free! So she thought, poor child, with a total indifference to honour and her word, which I do not attempt to excuse. She never once thought of her word, or of the engagement she had come under, or of the man who had been so kind to her, and loved her so faithfully. The children had holiday on that blessed morning, and Rose ran out with them into the garden, and ran wild with pure excess of joy.

This was the first day that Mr. Nolan had visited them since he went to his new duties, and as the Curate came into the garden, somewhat tired after a long walk, and expecting to find his friends something as he had left them—if not mourning, yet

subdued, as true mourners continue after the sharpness of their grief is ended—he was struck with absolute dismay to meet Rose, flushed and joyous, with one of the children mounted on her shoulders, and pursued by the rest, in the highest of high romps, the spring air resounding with their shouts. Rose blushed a little when she saw him. She put down her little brother from her shoulder, and came forward beaming with happiness and kindness.

“Oh! how glad I am that you have come to-day,” she said, and explained forthwith all the circumstances with the frank diffuse explanatoriness of youth. “Now we are rich again; and, oh! Mr. Nolan, I am so happy!” she cried, her soft eyes glowing with an excess of light which dazzled the Curate.

People who have never been rich themselves, and never have any chance of being rich, find it difficult sometimes to understand how others are affected in these unwonted circumstances. He was confounded by her frank rapture, the joy which seemed to him so much more than was necessary.

“I’m glad to see you so happy,” he said, bewildered; “no doubt money’s a blessing, and ye’ve felt the pinch, my poor child, or ye wouldn’t be so full of your joy.”

“Oh! Mr. Nolan, how I have felt it!” she said, her eyes filling with tears. A cloud fell over her face for the space of a moment, and then she laughed, and cried out joyously, “But, thank heaven, that is all over now!”

Mrs. Damerel was writing in the draw-

ing-room, writing to her boys to tell them the wonderful news. Rose led the visitor in, pushing open the window which opened on the garden.

“I have told him all about it, and how happy we are,” she said, going up to her mother with all the confidence of happiness, and giving her, with unwonted demonstration, a kiss upon the forehead, before she danced out again to the sunny garden.

Mrs. Damerel was a great deal more sober in her exultation, which relieved the Curate. She told him how it had all come about, and what a deliverance it was; then cried a little, having full confidence in his sympathy, over that unremovable regret that it had not come sooner.

“How happy it would have made him—

and relieved all his anxiety about us," she said.

Mr. Nolan made some inarticulate sound, which she took for assent; or, at least, which it pleased her to mistake for assent. In her present mood it was sweet to think that her husband had been anxious, and the Curate knew human nature too well to contradict her. And then she gave him a little history of the past three months, during which he had been absent, and of Rose's engagement, and all Mr. Incledon's good qualities.

"He would have done anything for us," said Mrs. Damerel; "but, oh! how glad I am we shall not want anything—only Rose's happiness, which in his hands is secure."

"Mr. Incledon?" said the Curate, with

a little wonder in his voice. "Ah! so that is it! I thought it couldn't be nothing but money that made the child so pleased."

"You thought she looked very happy?" said the mother, in a sudden fright.

"Happy! she looked like her name—nothing is so happy as that but the innocent creatures of God; and sure I did her injustice thinking 'twas the money," the Curate said, with mingled compunction and wonder; for the story altogether sounded very strange to him, and he could not but marvel at the thought that Mr. Incledon's love, once so evidently indifferent to her, should light such lamps of joy now in Rose's eyes.

Mrs. Damerel changed the subject abruptly. A mist of something like care



came over her face. "I have had a great deal of trouble and much to think about since I saw you," she said; "but I must not enter upon that, now that it is over. Tell me about yourself."

He shrugged his shoulders as he told her how little there was to tell. A new parish, with other poor folk much like those he had left, and other rich folk not far dissimilar—the one knowing as little about the other as the two classes generally do. "That is about all my life is ever likely to be," he said, with a half smile, "between the two, with no great hold on either. I miss Agatha, and Dick, and little Patty—and you to come and talk to most of all," he said, looking at her with an affectionate wistfulness which went to her heart. Not that Mr. Nolan was "in love"

with Mrs. Damerel, as vulgar persons would say, laughing; but the loss of her house and society was a great loss to the middle-aged Curate, never likely to have a home of his own.

“We must make it up as much as we can by talking all day long now you are here,” she said, with kind smiles; but the Curate, though he was fond of her, was quick to see that she avoided the subject of Mr. Incledon, and was ready to talk of anything rather than that; though, indeed, the first love and first proposed marriage in a family has generally an interest exceeding everything else to the young heroine’s immediate friends.

They had the merriest dinner at two o’clock, according to the habit of their humility, with roast mutton, which was the

only joint Mary Jane could not spoil; simple fare, which contented the Curate as well as a French *chef* could have done. He told them funny stories of his new people, at which the children shouted with laughter; and described the musical parties at the vicarage, and the solemn little dinners, and all the dreary entertainments of a small town. The White House had not heard so much innocent laughter, so many pleasant foolish jokes, for years—and I don't think that Rose had ever so distinguished herself in the domestic circle. She had been generally considered too old for fun among the children—too dignified, more on mamma's side—giving herself up to poetry and other such solemn occupations; but to-day the suppressed fountain burst forth. Even Mrs. Damerel did not

escape the infection of that laughter which rang like silver bells. The deep mourning they all wore, the poor little rusty black frocks trimmed still with crape, perhaps reproached the laughter now and then; but fathers and mothers cannot expect to be mourned for a whole year, and, indeed, the Rector, to these little ones at least, had not been much more than a name.

“Rose,” said Mrs. Damerel, when the meal was over, and they had returned into the drawing-room, “I think we had better arrange to go up to town one of these days, to see about your things. I have been putting off, and putting off, on account of our poverty; but it is full time to think of your trousseau now.”

Rose stood still as if she had been sud-

denly struck by some mortal blow. She looked at her mother with eyes opening wide, lips falling apart, and a sudden deadly paleness coming over her face. From the fresh sweetness of that rose tint which had come back to her she became all at once ashygrey, like an old woman. "My—what, mamma?" she faltered, putting her hands upon the table to support herself. "I—did not hear—what you said."

"You'll find me in the garden, ladies, when you want me," said the Curate, with a man's usual cowardice, "bolting," as he himself expressed it, through the open window.

Mrs. Damerel looked up from where she had seated herself at the table, and looked her daughter in the face.

“Your trousseau,” she said, calmly, “what else should it be?”

Rose gave a great and sudden cry. “That’s all over, mamma—all over, isn’t it?” she said eagerly; then hastening round to her mother’s side, fell on her knees by her chair, and caught her hand and arm, which she embraced and held close to her breast. “Mamma! speak to me—it’s all over—all over! You said the sacrifices we made would be required no longer. It is not needed any more, and it’s all over. Oh, say so, with your own lips, mamma!”

“Rose, are you mad?” said her mother, drawing away her hand; “rise up, and do not let me think my child is a fool. Over! is honour over, and the word you have pledged, and the engagement you have made?”

“Honour!” said Rose, with white lips; “but it was for you I did it, and you do not require it any more.”

“Rose,” cried Mrs. Damerel, “you will drive me distracted. I have often heard that women have no sense of honour, but I did not expect to see it proved in my own child. Can you go and tell the man who loves you that you will not marry him because we are no longer beggars? He would have helped us when we were penniless—is that a reason for casting him off now?”

Rose let her mother’s hand go, but she remained on her knees by the side of the chair, as if unable to move, looking up in Mrs. Damerel’s face with eyes twice their usual size.

“Then am I to be none the better—

none the better?" she cried piteously, "are they all to be saved, all rescued except me?"

"Get up, Rose," said Mrs. Damerel impatiently, "and do not let me hear any more of this folly. Saved! from an excellent man who loves you a great deal better than you deserve—from a lot that a queen might envy—everything that is beautiful and pleasant and good! You are the most ungrateful girl alive, or you would not venture to speak so to me."

Rose did not make any answer. She did not rise, but kept still by her mother's side, as if paralysed. After a moment Mrs. Damerel, in angry impatience, turned from her and resumed her writing; and there the girl continued to kneel, making no movement—heart-stricken, turned into marble.



At length, after an interval, she pulled timidly at her mother's dress, looking at her with eyes so full of entreaty, that they forced Mrs. Damerel, against her will, to turn round and meet that pathetic gaze.

"Mamma," she said, under her breath, her voice having failed her, "just one word—is there no hope for me? can you do nothing for me? Oh, have a little pity! You could do something, if you would but try."

"Are you mad, child?" cried the mother, again—"do something for you? What can I do? You promised to marry him, of your own will; you were not forced to do it. You told me you liked him not so long ago. How does this change the matter, except to make you more fit to be his wife? Are you mad?"

“Perhaps,” said Rose, softly ; “ if being very miserable is being mad, then I am mad, as you say.”

“ But you were not very miserable yesterday ; you were cheerful enough.”

“ Oh, mamma, then there was no hope,” cried Rose, “ I had to do it—there was no help ; but now hope has come—and must every one share it, every one get deliverance, but me ?”

“ Rose,” said Mrs. Damerel, “ when you are Mr. Incledon’s wife every one of these wild words will rise up in your mind and shame you. Why should you make yourself unhappy by constant discussions ? You will be sorry enough after for all you have allowed yourself to say. You have promised Mr. Incledon to marry him, and you must marry him. If I had six times Uncle

Edward's money it would still be a great match for you."

"Oh, what do I care for a great match!"

"But I do," said Mrs. Damerel, "and whether you care or not has nothing to do with it. You have pledged your word and your honour, and you cannot withdraw from them. Rose, your marriage is fixed for the end of July. We must have no more of this."

"Three months," she said, with a little convulsive shudder. She was thinking that perhaps even yet something might happen to save her in so long a time as three months.

"Not quite three months," said Mrs. Damerel, whose thoughts were running on the many things that had to be done in

the interval. "Rose, shake off this foolish repining, which is unworthy of you, and go out to good Mr. Nolan, who must be dull with only the children. Talk to him and amuse him till I am ready. I am going to take him up to Whitton, to show him the house."

Rose went out without a word; she went and sat down in the little shady summer-house, where Mr. Nolan had taken refuge from the sun and from the mirth of the children. He had seen that there was something wrong, and was prepared with his sympathy; whoever was the offender Mr. Nolan was always sorry for that one; it was a way he had; his sympathies did not go so much with the immaculate and always virtuous; but he was sorry for whosoever had erred or strayed, and was repenting of

the same. Poor Rose!—he began to feel himself Rose's champion, because he felt sure that it was Rose, young, thoughtless, and inconsiderate, who must be in the wrong. Rose sat down by his side with a heartbroken look in her face, but did not say anything. She began to beat with her fingers on the table as if she were beating time to a march. She was still such a child to him, so young, so much like what he remembered her in pinafores that his heart ached for her. "You are in some little bit of trouble?" he said at last.

"Oh, not a little bit," cried Rose, "a great, very great trouble!" She was so full of it that she could not talk of anything else. And the feeling in her mind was that she must speak or die. She began to tell her story in the woody arbour

with the gay noise of the children close at hand, but hearing a cry among them that Mr. Incledon was coming, started up and tied on her hat, and seizing Mr. Nolan's arm, dragged him out by the garden door. "I cannot see him to-day!" she cried, and led the Curate away, dragging him after her to a quiet byway over the fields in which she thought they would be safe. Rose had no doubt whatever of the full sympathy of this old friend. She was not afraid even of his disapproval. It seemed certain to her that he must pity at least if not help. And to Rose, in her youthful confidence in others, there was nothing in this world which was unalterable of its nature; no trouble, except death, which could not be got rid of by the intervention of friends.

It chilled her a little, however, as she went on, to see the Curate's face grow longer and longer, graver and graver. "You should not have done it," he said, shaking his head, when Rose told him how she had been brought to give her consent.

"I know I ought not to have done it—but it was not my doing. How could I help myself? And now, oh now, dear Mr. Nolan, tell me what to do! Will *you* speak to mamma? Though she will not listen to me she might hear you."

"But I don't see what your mamma has to do with it," said the Curate. "It is not to her you are engaged—nor is it she who has given her word; you must keep your word; we are all bound to do that."

"But a great many people don't do it," said Rose, driven to the worst of argu-

ments in sheer despair of her cause.

"*You* must," said Mr. Nolan. "The people who don't are not people to be followed. You have bound yourself, and you must stand by it. He is a good man, and you must make the best of it. To a great many it would not seem hard at all. You have accepted him, and you must stand by him. I do not see what else can be done now."

"Oh, Mr. Nolan, you speak as if I were married, and there was no hope."

"It is very much the same thing," said the Curate; "you have given your word. Rose, you would not like to be a jilt; you must either keep your word or be called a jilt—and called truly. It is not a pleasant character to have."

"But it would not be true!"



“I think it would be true. Mr. Inledon, poor man, would have good reason to think so. Let us look at it seriously, Rose. What is there so very bad in it that you should do a good man such an injury? He is not old. He is very agreeable and very rich. He would make you a great lady, Rose.”

“Mr. Nolan, do you think I care for that?”

“A great many people care for it, and so do all who belong to you. Your poor father wished it. It had gone out of my mind, but I can recollect very well now; and your mother wishes it—and for you it would be a great thing, you don’t know how great. Rose, you must try to put all this reluctance out of your mind, and think only of how many advantages it has.”

“I care nothing for the advantages,”

said Rose, "the only one thing was for the sake of the others. He promised to be good to the boys and to help mamma; and now we don't need his help any more."

"A good reason, an admirable reason," cried the Curate, with unwonted sarcasm, "for casting him off now. Few people state it so frankly, but it is the way of the world."

Rose gave him a look so full of wondering pain that the good man's heart was touched. "Come," he said, "you had made up your mind to it yesterday. It cannot be so very bad after all. At your age nothing can be very bad, for you can always adapt yourself to what is new. So long as there's nobody else in the way that's more to your mind?" he said, turning upon her with a penetrating glance.

Rose said nothing in reply. She put up her hands to her face, covering it, and choking the cry which came to her lips. How could she, to a man, to one so far separated from love and youth as was Mr. Nolan, make this last confession of all?

The Curate went away that night with a painful impression on his mind. He did not go to Whitton, as Mrs. Damerel had promised, to see Rose's future home, but he saw the master of it, who, disappointed by the headache with which Rose had retreated to her room, on her return from her walk with the Curate, did not show in his best aspect. None of the party indeed did; perhaps the excitement and commotion of the news had produced a bad result—for nothing could be flatter or more deadly-lively than the evening which

followed. Even the children were cross and peevish, and had to be sent to bed in disgrace ; and Rose had hidden herself in her room, and lines of care and irritation were on Mrs. Damerel's forehead. The great good fortune which had befallen them did not, for the moment at least, bring happiness in its train.

## CHAPTER IV.

ROSE did not go downstairs that night. She had a headache, which is the prescriptive right of a woman in trouble. She took the cup of tea which Agatha brought her, at the door of her room, and begged that mamma would not trouble to come to see her, as she was going to bed. She was afraid of another discussion, and shrank even from seeing anyone. She had passed through a great many different moods of mind in respect to Mr. Incledon, but this one was different from all the rest. All

the softening of feeling of which she had been conscious died out of her mind; his very name became intolerable to her. That which she had proposed to do, as the last sacrifice a girl could make for her family, an absolute renunciation of self and voluntary martyrdom for them, changed its character altogether when they no longer required it. Why should she do what was worse than death, when the object for which she was willing to die was no longer before her; when there was, indeed, no need for doing it at all? Would Iphigenia have died for her word's sake, had there been no need for her sacrifice? and why should Rose do more than she? In this there was, the reader will perceive, a certain change of sentiment; for though Rose had made up her mind sadly and reluctant-

ly to marry Mr. Incledon, yet she had not thought the alternative worse than death. She had felt while she did it the ennobling sense of having given up her own will to make others happy, and had even recognised the far-off and faint possibility that the happiness which she thus gave to others might, some time or other, rebound upon herself. But the moment her great inducement was removed, a flood of different sentiment came in. She began to hate Mr. Incledon, to feel that he had taken advantage of her circumstances, that her mother had taken advantage of her, that everyone had used her as a tool to promote their own purpose, with no more consideration for her than had she been altogether without feeling. This thought went through her mind like a hot breath from a

furnace, searing and scorching everything. And now that their purpose was served without her, she must still make this sacrifice—for honour! For honour! Perhaps it is true that women hold this motive more lightly than men, though indeed the honour that is involved in a promise of marriage does not seem to influence either sex very deeply in ordinary cases. I am afraid poor Rose did not feel its weight at all. She might be forced to keep her word, but her whole soul revolted against it. She had ceased to be sad and resigned; she was rebellious and indignant; and a hundred wild schemes and notions began to flit through her mind. To jump in such a crisis as this from the tender resignation of a martyr for love into the bitter and painful resistance of a domestic



rebel who feels that no one loves her, is easy to the young mind in the unreality which more or less envelops everything to youth. From the one to the other was but a step. Yesterday she had been the centre of all the family plans, the foundation of comfort, the chief object of their thoughts. Now she was in reality only Rose the eldest daughter, who was about to make a brilliant marriage, and therefore was much in the foreground, but no more loved or noticed than anyone else. In reality this change had actually come, but she imagined a still greater change; and fancy showed her to herself as the rebellious daughter, the one who had never fully done her duty, never been quite in sympathy with her mother, and whom all would be glad to get rid of, in marriage

or any other way, as interfering with the harmony of the house. Such of us as have been young may remember how easy these revolutions of feeling were, and with what quick facility we could identify ourselves as almost adored or almost hated, as the foremost object of everybody's regard, or an intruder in everybody's way.

Rose passed a very miserable night, and the next day was, I think, more miserable still. Mrs. Damerel did not say a word to her on the subject which filled her thoughts, but told her that she had decided to go to London in the beginning of the next week, to look after the "things" which were necessary. As they were in mourning already, there was no more trouble of that description necessary on

Uncle Edward's account, but only new congratulations to receive, which poured in on every side.

"I need not go through the form of condoling, for I know you did not have much intercourse with him, poor old gentleman," one lady said; and another caught Rose by both hands and exclaimed on the good luck of the family in general.

"Blessings, like troubles, never come alone," she said. "To think you should have a fortune tumbling down upon you on one side, and on the other this chit of a girl carrying off the best match in the county!"

"I hope we are sufficiently grateful for all the good things Providence sends us," said Mrs. Damerel, fixing her eyes severely upon Rose.

Oh, if she had but had the courage to take up the glove thus thrown down to her! But she was not yet screwed up to that desperate pitch.

Mr. Incledon came later, and in his joy at seeing her, was more lover-like than he had yet permitted himself to be.

“Why, I have not seen you since this good news came!” he cried, fondly kissing her in his delight and heartiness of congratulation, a thing he had never done before. Rose broke from him, and rushed out of the room, white with fright and resentment.

“Oh, how dared he!—how dared he!” she cried, rubbing the spot upon her cheek which his lips had touched with wild exaggeration of dismay.

And how angry Mrs. Damerel was!

She went upstairs after the girl, and spoke to her as Rose had never yet been spoken to in all her soft life—upbraiding her with her heartlessness, her disregard of other people's feelings, her indifference to her own honour and plighted word. Once more Rose remained upstairs, refusing to come down, and the house was aghast at the first quarrel which had ever disturbed its decorum.

Mr. Incledon went away bewildered and unhappy, not knowing whether to believe that this was a mere ebullition of temper, such as Rose had never shown before, which would have been a venial offence, rather amusing than otherwise to his indulgent fondness; or whether it meant something more, some surging upwards of the old reluctance to accept him, which he

had believed himself to have overcome. This doubt chilled him to the heart, and gave him much to think of as he took his somewhat dreary walk home—for failure, after there has been an appearance of success, is more discouraging still than when there has been no opening at all in the clouded skies. And Agatha knocked at Rose's locked door, and bade her good night through the keyhole with a mixture of horror and respect—horror for the wickedness, yet veneration for the courage which could venture thus to beard all constituted authorities.

Mrs. Damerel herself said no good-night to the rebel. She passed Rose's door steadily, without allowing herself to be led away by the impulse which tugged at her heart to go in and give the kiss of

grace, notwithstanding the impenitent condition of the offender. Had the mother done this, I think all that followed might have been averted, and that Mrs. Damerel would have been able eventually to carry out her programme, and arrange the girl's life as she wished. But she thought it right to show her displeasure, though her heart almost failed her in the act.

Rose had shut herself up in wild misery and passion. She had declared to herself that she wanted to see no one—that she would not open her door, nor subject herself over again to such reproaches as had been poured upon her. But yet, when she heard her mother pass without even a word, all the springs of the girl's being seemed to stand still. She could not believe it. Never before in all her life had such

a terrible occurrence taken place. On the previous night, when she had gone to bed to escape remark, Mrs. Damerel had come in ere she went to her own room and asked after the pretended headache, and kissed her, and bade her keep quite still and be better to-morrow. Rose got up from where she was sitting, expecting her mother's appeal, and intending to resist, and went to the door and put her ear against it and listened. All was quiet. Mrs. Damerel had gone steadily along the corridor, had entered the rooms of the other children, and now shut her own door—sure signal that the day was over. When this inexorable sound met her ears, Rose crept back again to her seat, and wept bitterly, with an aching and vacancy in her heart which it is beyond



words to tell. It seemed to her that she was abandoned, cut off from the family love, thrown aside like a waif and stray, and that things would never be again as they had been. This terrible conclusion always comes in to aggravate the miseries of girls and boys. Things could never mend, never again be as they had been.

Rose cried till she exhausted herself, till her head ached in dire reality, and she was sick and faint with misery and the sense of desolation; and then wild schemes and fancies came into her mind. She could not bear it—scarcely for those dark helpless hours of the night could she bear it—but must be still till daylight; then, poor forlorn child, cast off by everyone, abandoned even by her mother, with no hope before her but this marriage,

which she hated, and no prospect but wretchedness—then she made up her mind she would go away. She took out her little purse, and found a few shillings in it, sufficient to carry her to the refuge which she had suddenly thought of. I think she would have liked to fly out of sight and ken, and hide herself for ever, or at least until all who had been unkind to her had broken their hearts about her, as she had read in novels of unhappy heroines doing. But she was too timid to take such a daring step, and she had no money, except the ten shillings in her poor little pretty purse, which was not meant to hold much. When she had made up her mind, as she thought, or, to speak more truly, when she had been quite taken possession of by this wild purpose, she put a few

necessaries into a bag to be ready for her flight, taking her little prayer-book last of all, which she kissed and cried over with a heart wrung with many pangs. Her father had given it to her on the day she was nineteen—not a year since. Ah, why was she not with him, who always understood her—or, why was not he here? He would never have driven her to such a step as this. He was kind, whatever anyone might say of him. If he neglected some things, he was never hard upon anyone—at least, never hard upon Rose—and he would have understood her now.

With an anguish of sudden sorrow, mingled with all the previous misery in her heart, she kissed the little book and put it into her bag. Poor child ! it was

well for her that her imagination had that sad asylum, at least, to take refuge in, and that the Rector had not lived long enough to show how hard in worldliness a soft and indulgent man can be.

Rose did not go to bed. She had a short, uneasy sleep, against her will, in her chair, dropping into constrained and feverish slumber for an hour or so in the dead of the night. When she woke the dawn was blue in the window, making the branches of the honeysuckle visible through the narrow panes. There was no sound in heaven or earth except the birds chirping, but the world seemed full of that; for all the domestic chat has to be got over in all the nests before men awake and drown the delicious babble in harsher commotions of their own.

Rose got up and bathed her pale face

and red eyes, and put on her hat. She was cold, and glad to draw a shawl round her and get some consolation and strength from its warmth; and then she took her bag in her hand, and opening her door, noiselessly stole out. There was a very early train which passed the Dingle station, two miles from Dinglefield, at about five o'clock, on its way to London, and Rose hoped, by being in time for that, to escape all pursuit.

How strange it was going out like a thief into the house, all still and shut up, with its windows closely barred, the shutters up, and a still, unnatural half-light gleaming in through the crevices! As she stole downstairs her very breathing, the sound of her own steps, frightened Rose; and when she looked in at the open door of the drawing-room, and saw all the

traces of last night's peaceful occupations, a strange feeling that all the rest were dead and she a fugitive stealing guiltily away, came on her so strongly, that she could scarcely convince herself it was not true. It was like the half-light that had been in all the rooms when her father lay dead in the house, and made her shiver. Feeling more and more like a thief, she opened the fastenings of the hall door, which were rusty and gave her some trouble. It was difficult to open them, still more difficult to close it softly without alarming the house; and this occupied her mind, so that she made the last step almost without thinking what a terrible decision her thoughts had come to, and what a gulf she was about to place between herself and all her previous life.

When she had succeeded, however, in shutting the door, then it suddenly flashed upon her—rushed upon her like a flood—the consciousness of what she had done. She had left home, and all help and love and protection; and—heaven help her!—here she was out of doors in the open-eyed day, which looked at her with a severe, pale calm—desolate and alone! She held by the pillars of the porch to support her for one dizzy, bewildered moment; but now was not the time to break down or let her terrors, her feelings overcome her. She had taken the decisive step and must go on now.

Mrs. Damerel, disturbed perhaps by the sound of the closing door, though she did not make out what it was, got up and looked out from the window in the early morning, and, at the end of the road which led

to the Green, saw a solitary figure walking which reminded her of Rose. She had half-forgotten Rose's perverseness, in her sleep, and I think the first thing that came into her mind had been rather the great deliverance sent to her in the shape of Uncle Edward's fortune, than the naughtiness—though it was almost too serious to be called naughtiness—of her child. And though it struck her for the moment with some surprise to see the slim young figure on the road so early, and a passing notion crossed her mind that something in the walk and outline was like Rose, yet it never occurred to her to connect that unusual appearance with her daughter. She lay down again when she had opened the window with a little half-wish, half-prayer that Rose might "come to her senses" speedily. It



was too early to get up, and though Mrs. Damerel could not sleep, she had plenty to think about, and this morning leisure was the best time for it. Rose prevailed largely among her subjects of thought, but did not fill her whole mind. She had so many other children, and so much to consider about them all!

Meanwhile Rose went on to the station, like a creature in a dream, feeling the very trees, the very birds, watch her, and wondering that no faces peeped at her from the curtained cottage windows. How strange to think that all the people were asleep, while she walked along through the dreamy world, her footsteps filling it with strange echoes! How fast and soundly it slept, that world—though all the things out-of-doors were in full move-

ment, interchanging their opinions, and taking council upon all their affairs! She had never been out, and had not very often been awake, at such an early hour; and the stillness from all human sounds and voices, combined with the wonderful fulness of the language of Nature, gave her a strange, bewildered feeling, like that a traveller might have in some strange star or planet, peopled with beings different from man. It seemed as if all the human inhabitants had resigned, and given up their places to another species. The fresh air which blew in her face, and the cheerful stir of the birds, recovered her a little from the fright with which she felt herself alone in that changed universe—and the sight of the first wayfarer, making his way, like herself, toward the

station, gave her a thrill of pain, reminding her that she was neither walking in a dream nor in another planet, but on the old-fashioned earth, dominated by men, and where she shrank from being seen or recognised. She put her veil down over her face as she stole in, once more feeling like a thief, at the railway gate. Two or three people only, all of the working class, were kicking their heels on the little platform. Rose took her ticket with much trepidation, and stole into the quietest corner, to await the arrival of the train. It came up at last with a great commotion, the one porter rushing to open the door of a carriage, out of which, Rose perceived quickly, a gentleman jumped, giving directions about some luggage. An arrival was a very rare event at so early an hour in the morning.

Rose went forward timidly with her veil over her face to creep into the carriage which this traveller had vacated, and which seemed the only one empty. She had not looked at him, nor had she any curiosity about him.

The porter, busy with the luggage, paid no attention to her, for which she was thankful, and she thought she was getting away quite unobserved, which gave her a little comfort. She had her foot on the step, and her hand on the carriage door, to get in.

“Miss Damerel!” cried an astonished voice close by her ear.

Rose’s foot failed on the step. She almost fell with the start this gave her. Whose voice was it? a voice she knew—a voice somehow that went to her heart; but in

the first shock she did not ask herself any questions about it, but felt only the distress and terror of being recognised. Then she decided that it was her best policy to steal into the carriage to escape questions. She did so, trembling with fright ; but as she sat down in the corner turned her face unwittingly towards the person, whoever it was, who had recognised her. He had left his luggage, and was gazing at her with his hand on the door. His face, all flushed with delight, gleamed upon her like sudden sunshine.

“Miss Damerel !” he cried again, “you here at this hour ?”

I am not sure that she knew him at the first glance. Poor child, her heart was too deeply pre-occupied to do more than flutter feebly at the sight of him, and no second-

any thought as to how he had come here, or what unlooked-for circumstances had brought him back, was within the range of her intelligence. Edward Wodehouse made no more than a momentary pause ere he decided what to do. He slipped a coin into the porter's ready hand, and gave him directions about his luggage. "Keep it safe till I return; don't send it home. I am obliged to go to town for an hour or two," he said, and sprang again into the carriage he had just left. His heart was beating with no feeble flutter. He had the promptitude of a man who knows that no opportunity ought to be neglected. The door closed upon them with that familiar bang which we all know so well; the engine shrieked, the wheels jarred, and Rose Damerel and Edward Wodehouse—two people whom

even the Imperial Government of England had been set in action to separate—moved away into the distance, as if they had eloped with each other, sitting face to face.

Her heart fluttered feebly enough—his heart as strong as the pulsations of the steam-engine, and he thought almost as audible ; but the first moment was one of embarrassment. “I cannot get over the wonder of this meeting,” he said. “Miss Damerel, what happy chance takes you to London this morning of all others ? Some fairy must have done it for me ?”

“No happy chance at all,” said Rose, shivering with painful emotion, and drawing her shawl closer round her. What could she say to him ?—but she began to realise that it was *him*, which was the strangest bewildering sensation. As for

Wodehouse himself, ignorant as he was of the mystery and misery involved, the tender sympathy in his face grew deeper and deeper. Could it be poverty? could she be going to work like any other poor girl? A great throb of love and pity went through the young man's heart.

"Don't be angry with me," he said; "but I cannot see you here, alone and looking sad—and take no interest. Can you tell me what it is? Can you make any use of me? Miss Damerel, don't you know there is nothing in the world that would make me so happy as to be of service to you?"

"Have you just come home?" she asked.

"This morning; I was on my way from Portsmouth. And you—won't you tell me something about yourself?"



Rose made a tremendous effort to go back to the ordinary regions of talk ; and then she recollected all that had happened since he had been away. “ You know that papa died,” she said, the tears springing to her eyes with an effort of nature which relieved her brain and heart.

“ I heard that : I was very, very sorry.”

“ And then for a time we were very poor ; but now we are well off again by the death of mamma’s uncle Edward ; that is all, I think,” she said, with an attempt at a smile.

Then there was a pause. How was he to subject her to a cross-examination ? and yet Edward felt that, unless something had gone very wrong, the girl would not have been here.

“ You are going to town ?” he said, “ It

is very early for you; and alone?——”

“I do not mind,” said Rose; and then she added quickly, “When you go back, will you please not say you have seen me? I don’t want anyone to know.”

“Miss Damerel, something has happened to make you unhappy?”

“Yes,” she said, “but never mind. It does not matter much to any one but me. Your mother is very well. Did she know that you were coming home?”

“No, it is quite sudden. I am promoted by the help of some kind unknown friend or another, and they could not refuse me a few days leave——”

“Mrs. Wodehouse will be very glad,” said Rose.

She seemed to rouse out of her pre-occupation to speak to him, and then fell

back. The young sailor was at his wits end. What a strange coming home it was to him ! He had dreamt of his first meeting with Rose in a hundred different ways, and rehearsed it, and all that he would say to her ; but such a wonderful meeting as this had never occurred to him ; and to have her entirely to himself, yet not to know what to say !

“ There must be changes since I left. It will soon be a year ago,” he said, in sheer despair.

“ I do not remember any changes,” said Rose, “ except the Rectory. We are in the White House now. Nothing else has happened that I know—yet.”

This little word made his blood run cold—*yet*. Did it mean that something was about to happen ? He tried to over-

come that impression by a return to the ground he was sure of.

“May I speak of last year?” he said.  
“I went away very wretched—as wretched as any man could be.”

Rose was too far gone to think of the precautions with which such a conversation ought to be conducted. She knew what he meant, and why should she pretend she did not? Not that this reflection passed through her mind, which acted totally upon impulse, without any reflection at all.

“It was not my fault,” she said, simply.  
“I was alone with papa, and he would not let me go.”

“Ah!” he said, his eyes lighting up;  
“you did not think me presumptuous, then? you did not mean to crush me? Oh! if you knew how I have thought of

it, and questioned myself! It has never been out of my mind for a day—for an hour——”

She put up her hand hastily.

“I may be doing wrong,” she said, “but it would be more wrong still to let you speak. They would think it was for this I came away.”

“What is it?—what is it?” he said; “something has happened. Why may not I tell you, when I have at last this blessed opportunity? Why is it wrong to let me speak?”

“They will think it was for this I came away,” said Rose. “Oh! Mr. Wodehouse, you should not have come with me. They will say I knew you were to be here. Even mamma, perhaps, will think so, for she does not think well of me, as papa used to

do. She thinks I am selfish, and care only for my own pleasure," said Rose, with tears.

"You have come away without her knowledge?"

"Yes."

"Then you are escaping from some one," said Wodehouse, his face flushing over.

"Yes ! yes !"

"Miss Damerel, come back with me. Nobody, I am sure, will force you to do anything. Your mother is too good to be unkind. Will you come back with me? Ah, you must not—you must not throw yourself upon the world; you do not know what it is," said the young sailor, taking her hand, in his earnestness. "Rose—dear Rose—let me take you back."

She drew her hand away from him, and dried the hot tears which scorched her eyes.

“No, no,” she said. “You do not know, and I want nobody to know. You will not tell your mother, nor any one. Let me go, and let no one think of me any more.”

“As if that were possible!” he cried.

“Oh, yes, it is possible. I loved papa dearly; but I seldom think of him now. If I could die you would all forget me in a year. To be sure I cannot die; and even if I did, people might say that was selfish too. Yes, you don’t know what things mamma says. I have heard her speak as if it were selfish to die,—escaping from one’s duties; and I am escaping from my duties; but it can never, never be a duty

to marry when you cannot——. What am I saying?" said poor Rose. "My head is quite light, and I think I must be going crazy. You must not mind what I say."



## CHAPTER V.

**E**DWARD WODEHOUSE reached Dinglefield about eleven o'clock, coming back from that strange visit to town. He felt it necessary to go to the White House before even he went to his mother, but he was so cowardly as to go round a long way so as to avoid crossing the Green, or exhibiting himself to public gaze. He felt that his mother would never forgive him did she know that he had gone anywhere else before going to her; and, indeed, I

think Mrs. Wodehouse's feeling was very natural. He put his hat well over his eyes, but he did not, as may be supposed, escape recognition—and went on with a conviction that the news of his arrival would reach his mother before he did, and that he would have something far from delightful to meet with when he went home.

As for Mrs. Damerel, when she woke up in the morning to the fact that Rose was gone, her first feelings, I think, were more those of anger than of alarm. She was not afraid that her daughter had committed suicide, or run away permanently ; for she was very reasonable, and her mind fixed upon the probabilities of a situation rather than on the violent catastrophes which might be possible. It was Agatha who

first brought her the news open-mouthed, and shouting the information, "Oh ! mamma, come here, come here, Rose has run away !" so that everyone in the house could hear.

"Nonsense, child ! she has gone—to do something for me," said the mother on the spur of the moment, prompt to save exposure even at the instant when she received the shock.

"But, mamma," cried Agatha, "her bed has not been slept in, her things are gone—her——"

Here Mrs. Damerel put her hand over the girl's mouth, and with a look she never forgot, went with her into the empty nest, from which the bird had flown. All Mrs. Damerel's wits rallied to her on the mo-

ment, to save the scandal which was inevitable if this were known.

“Shut the door,” she said, in a low, quiet voice. “Rose is very foolish: because she thinks she has quarrelled with me, to make such a show of her undutifulness! She has gone up to town by the early train.”

“Then you knew!” cried Agatha, with eyes as wide open as just now her mouth had been.

“Do you think it likely she would go without my knowing?” said her mother; an unanswerable question, for which Agatha, though her reason discovered the imposture, could find no ready response. She looked on with wonder while her mother, with her own hands, tossed the coverings off the little white bed, and gave

it the air of having been slept in. It was Agatha's first lesson in the art of making things appear as they are not.

"Rose has been foolish; but I don't choose that Mary Jane should make a talk about it, and tell everybody that she did not go to bed last night like a Christian—and do you hold your tongue," said Mrs. Damerel.

Agatha followed her mother's directions with awe, and was subdued all day by a sense of mystery; for why, if mamma knew all about it, and it was quite an ordinary proceeding, should Rose have gone to town by the early train?

Mrs. Damerel, however, had no easy task to get calmly through the breakfast, and arrange her household matters for the day, with this question perpetually recurring to

her, with sharp thrills and shoots of pain— Where was Rose? She had been angry at first, deeply annoyed and vexed, but now other feelings struck in. An anxiety, which did not suggest any definite danger, but was dully and persistently present in her mind, like something hanging over her, took possession of her whole being. Where had she gone? What could she be doing at the moment? What steps could her mother take to find out, without exposing her foolishness to public gaze? How should she satisfy Mr. Incledon? how conceal this strange disappearance from her neighbours. They all took, what people are pleased to call “a deep interest” in Rose, and, indeed, in all the late Rector’s family; and Mrs. Damerel knew the world well enough to be aware that the things

which one wishes to be kept secret, are just those which everybody manages to hear. She forgot even to be angry with Rose in the deep necessity of concealing the extraordinary step she had taken ; a step enough to lay a young girl under an enduring stigma all her life ; and what could she do to find her without betraying her ? She could not even make an inquiry without risking this betrayal. She could not ask a passenger on the road, or a porter at the station, if they had seen her, lest she should thereby make it known that Rose's departure had been clandestine. All through the early morning, while she was busy with the children and the affairs of the house, this problem was working in her mind. Of all things this was the most important, not to compromise Rose, or to

let any one know what a cruel and unkind step she had taken. Mrs. Damerel knew well how such a stigma clings to a child, and how ready the world is to impute other motives than the real one, Perhaps she <sup>True</sup> had been hard upon her child, and pressed a hateful sacrifice upon her unduly, but now Rose's credit was the first thing she thought of. She would not even attempt to get relief to her own anxiety at the cost of any animadversion upon Rose; or suffer anybody to suspect her daughter in order to ease herself. This necessity made her position doubly difficult and painful, for, without compromising Rose, she did not know how to inquire into her disappearance or what to do; and, as the moments passed over with this perpetual undercurrent going on in her mind, the



sense of painful anxiety grew stronger and stronger. Where could she have gone? She had left no note, no letter behind her, as runaways are generally supposed to do. She had, her mother knew, only a few shillings in her purse; she had no relations at hand with whom she could find refuge. Where had she gone? Every minute this question pressed more heavily upon her, and sounded louder and louder. Could she go on shutting it up in her mind, taking counsel of no one? Mrs. Damerel felt this to be impossible, and after breakfast sent a telegram to Mr. Nolan, begging him to come to her "on urgent business." She felt sure that Rose had confided some of her troubles at least to him; and he was a friend upon whose help and secrecy she could fully rely.

Her mind was in this state of intense inward perturbation and outward calm, when, standing at her bedroom window, which commanded the road and a corner of the Green, upon which the road opened, she saw Edward Wodehouse coming toward the house. I suppose there was never anyone yet in great anxiety and suspense, who did not go to the window with some sort of forlorn hope of seeing something to relieve them. She recognised the young man at once, though she did not know of his arrival, or even that he was looked for; and the moment she saw him, instantly gave him a place—though she could not tell what place—in the maze of her thoughts. Her heart leaped up at sight of him, though he might be but walking past, he might be but coming to pay an ordinary call on his

return, for anything she knew. Instinctively, her heart associated him with her child. She watched him come in through the little shrubbery, scarcely knowing where she stood, so intense was her suspense; then went down to meet him, looking calm and cold, as if no anxiety had ever clouded her firmament.

“How do you do, Mr. Wodehouse? I did not know you had come back,” she said, with perfect composure, as if he had been the most everyday acquaintance, and she had parted from him last night.

He looked at her with a countenance much paler and more agitated than her own, and, with that uneasy air of deprecation natural to a man who has a confession to make. “No one did; or, indeed, does,” he said, “not even my mother. I got my

promotion quite suddenly, and insisted upon a few days' leave to see my friends before I joined my ship."

"I congratulate you," said Mrs. Damerel, putting heroic force upon herself. "I suppose, then, I should have said Captain Wodehouse? How pleased your mother will be!"

"Yes," he said, abstractedly. "I should not, as you may suppose, have taken the liberty to come here so early merely to tell you a piece of news concerning myself. I came up from Portsmouth during the night, and when the train stopped at this station—by accident—Miss Damerel got into the same carriage in which I was. She charged me with this note to give to you."

There was a sensation in Mrs. Damerel's

ears as if some sluice had given way in the secrecy of her heart, and the blood was surging and swelling upwards. But she managed to smile a ghastly smile at him, and to take the note without further display of her feelings. It was a little twisted note written in pencil, which Wodehouse, indeed, had, with much trouble, persuaded Rose to write. Her mother opened it with fingers trembling so much that the undoing of the scrap of paper was a positive labour to her. She dropped softly into a chair, however, with a great and instantaneous sense of relief, the moment she had read these few pencilled words:—

“Mamma, I have gone to Miss Margetts. I am very wretched, and don’t know what to do. I could not stay at home any

longer. Do not be angry. I think my heart will break."

Mrs. Damerel did not notice these pathetic words. She saw "Miss Margetts," and that was enough for her. Her blood resumed its usual current, her heart began to beat less violently. She felt, as she leant back in her chair, exhausted and weak with the agitation of the morning; weak as one only feels when the immediate pressure is over. Miss Margetts was the schoolmistress with whom Rose had received her education. No harm to Rose, nor her reputation, could come did all the world know that she was there. She was so much and instantaneously relieved, that her watchfulness over herself intermitted, and she did not speak for a minute or two. She roused herself up with a little start

when she caught Wodehouse's eye gravely fixed upon her.

"Thanks," she said; "I am very glad to have this little note, telling me of Rose's safe arrival with her friends in London. It was very good of you to bring it. I do not know what put it into the child's head to go by that early train."

"Whatever it was, it was very fortunate for me," said Edward. "As we had met by such a strange chance, I took the liberty of seeing her safe to Miss Margetts' house."

"You are very good," said Mrs. Damerel; "I am much obliged to you;" and then the two were silent for a moment, eyeing each other like wrestlers before they close.

"Mrs. Damerel," said young Wodehouse, faltering, and brave sailor as he was, feel-

ing more frightened than he could have said, "there is something more which I ought to tell you. Meeting her so suddenly, and remembering how I had been balked in seeing her before I left Dinglefield, I was overcome by my feelings, and ventured to tell Miss Damerel ——"

"Mr. Wodehouse, my daughter is engaged to be married!" cried Mrs. Damerel, with sharp and sudden alarm.

"But not altogether—with her own will," he said.

"You must be mistaken," said the mother, with a gasp for breath. "Rose is foolish, and changes with every wind that blows. She cannot have intended to leave any such impression on your mind. It is the result, I suppose, of some lovers' quarrel. As this is the case, I need not



say that though, under any other circumstances, I should deeply have felt the honour you do her, yet, in the present, the only thing I can do is to say good morning and many thanks. Have you really not seen your mother yet?"

"Not yet. I am going——"

"Oh, go, please, go!" said Mrs. Damerel. "It was extremely kind of you to bring the note before going home, but your mother would never forgive me if I detained you; good-bye. If you are here for a few days I may hope to see you before you go."

With these words she accompanied him to the door, smiling cordially as she dismissed him. He could neither protest against the dismissal nor linger in spite of it, to repeat the love-tale which she had

stopped on his lips. Her apparent calm had almost deceived him, and but for a little quiver of her shadow upon the wall, a little clasping together of her hands, with Rose's letter in them, which nothing but the keenest observation could have detected, he could almost have believed in his bewilderment that Rose had been dreaming, and that her mother was quite cognizant of her flight, and knew where she was going and all about it. But, however that might be, he had to go, in a very painful maze of thought, not knowing what to think or to hope about Rose, and having a whimsical certainty of what must be awaiting him at home, had his mother heard, as was most likely, of his arrival, and that he had gone first to the White House. Fortunately for him, Mrs. Wodehouse had not

heard it ; but she poured into his reluctant ears the whole story of Mr. Incledon and the engagement, and of all the wonders with which he was filling Whitton in preparation for his bride.

“Though I think she treated you very badly, after encouraging you as she did, and leading you on to the very edge of a proposal—yet one can’t but feel that she is a very lucky girl,” said Mrs. Wodehouse. “I hope you will take care not to throw yourself in their way, my dear ; though, perhaps, on the whole, it would be best to show that you have got over it entirely, and don’t mind who she marries. A little insignificant chit of a girl, not worth your notice. There are as good fish in the sea, Edward—or better, for that matter.”

“Perhaps you are right, mother,” he

said, glad to escape from the subject; and then he told her the mystery of his sudden promotion, and how he had struggled to get this fortnight's leave before joining his ship, which was in commission for China. Mrs. Wodehouse fatigued her brain with efforts to discover who it could be who had thus mysteriously befriended her boy; and as this subject drew her mind from the other, Edward was thankful enough to listen to her suggestions of this man who was dead, and that man who was at the end of the world. He had not an idea himself who it could be, and, I think, cherished a furtive hope that it was his good service which had attracted the notice of My Lords; for young men are easily subject to this kind of illusion. But his mind, it may be supposed, was sufficiently disturbed

without any question of the kind. He had to reconcile Rose's evident misery in her flight, with her mother's calm acceptance of it as a thing she knew of; and to draw a painful balance between Mrs. Damerel's power to insist and command, and Rose's power of resistance; finally, he had the despairing consciousness that his leave was only for a fortnight, a period too short for anything to be decided on. No hurried settlement of the extraordinary imbroglio of affairs which he perceived dimly—no licence, however special, would make it possible to secure Rose in a fortnight's time; and he was bound to China for three years! This reflection, you may well suppose, gave the young man enough to think of, and made his first day at home anything

but the ecstatic holiday which a first day at home ought to be.

As for Mrs. Damerel, when she went into her own house, after seeing this dangerous intruder to the door, the sense of relief which had been her only conscious feeling up to this moment, gave place to the irritation and repressed wrath which, I think, was very natural. She said to herself, bitterly, that as the father had been so the daughter was. They consulted their own happiness, their own feelings, and left her to make everything straight behind them. What did it matter what she felt? What was the good of her but to bear the burden of their self-indulgence?—to make up for the wrongs they did, and conceal the scandal? I am aware that in such a case, as in almost all others,

the general sympathy goes with the young; but yet I think poor Mrs. Damerel had much justification for the bitterness in her heart. She wept a few hot tears by herself, which nobody even knew of or suspected; and then she returned to the children's lessons and her daily business, her head swimming a little, and with a weakness born of past agitation, but subdued into a composure not feigned but real. For, after all, everything can be remedied except exposure, she thought to herself; and going to Miss Margetts' showed at least a glimmering of common sense on the part of the runaway, and saved all public discussion of the "difficulty" which had arisen between the mother and the child.

Mrs. Damerel was a clergyman's wife—nay, one might say a clergywoman in her

own person, accustomed to all the special decorums and exactitudes which those who take the duties of the caste to heart consider incumbent upon that section of humanity; but she set about inventing a series of fibs on the spot with an ease which I fear long practice and custom had given. How many fibs had she been compelled to tell on her husband's behalf?—exquisite little romances about his health and his close study, and the mental occupations which kept him from little necessary duties; although she knew perfectly well that his study was mere desultory reading, and his delicate health self-indulgence. She had shielded him so with that delicate network of falsehood that the Rector had gone out of the world with the highest reputation.



*She* had all her life been subject to remark as rather a commonplace wife for such a man, but no one had dreamt of criticising him. Now she had the same thing to begin over again; and she carried her system to such perfection that she began upon her own family, as indeed in her husband's case she had always done, imbuing the children with a belief in his abstruse studies and sensitive organization, as well as the outer world.

“Rose has gone to pay Miss Margetts a visit,” she said, at the early dinner. “I think a little change will do her good. I shall run up to town in a few days and see after her things.”

“Gone to Miss Margetts’! I wonder why no one ever said so,” cried Agatha,

who was always full of curiosity. "What a funny thing to go off on a visit without even saying a word!"

"It was settled quite suddenly," said the mother, with perfect composure. "I don't think she has been looking well for some days; and I always intended to go to town about her things."

"What a very funny thing," repeated Agatha, "to go off at five o'clock; never to say a word to anyone—not even to take a box with her clothes, only that little black bag. I never heard of anything so funny; and to be so excited about it that she never went to bed."

"Do not talk nonsense," said Mrs. Damerel, sharply; "it was not decided till the evening before, after you were all asleep."

"But, mamma——"

“I think you might take some of this pudding down to poor Mary Simpson,” said Mrs. Damerel, calmly—“she has so little appetite, poor girl; and, Agatha, you can call at the post-office, and ask Mrs. Brown if her niece has got a place yet—I think she might suit me as housemaid, if she has not got a place.”

“Then, thank heaven,” said Agatha, diverted entirely into a new channel, “we shall get rid of Mary Jane!”

Having thus, as it were, made her experiment upon the subject nearest her heart, Mrs. Damerel had her little romance perfectly ready for Mr. Incledon when he came. “You must not blame me for a little disappointment to-day,” she said, “though indeed I ought to have sent you word, had I not been so busy. You must

have seen that Rose was not herself yesterday. She has her father's fine organization, poor child, and all our troubles have told upon her. I have sent her to her old school, to Miss Margetts, whose care I can rely upon, for a little change. It will be handy in many ways, for I must go to town for shopping, and it will be less fatiguing to Rose to meet me there than to go up and down on the same day.

"Then she was not well yesterday?" said Mr. Incledon, over whose face various changes had passed of disappointment, annoyance, and relief.

"Could you not see that?" said the mother, smiling with gentle reproof. "When did Rose show temper before? She has her faults, but that is not one of them; but she has her father's fine organi-

zation. I don't hesitate to say now, when it is all over, that poverty brought us many annoyances and some privations, as it does to everybody, I suppose. Rose has borne up bravely, but of course she felt them; and it is a speciality with such highly-strung natures," said this elaborate deceiver, "that they never break down till the pressure is removed."

"Ah! I ought to have known it," said Mr. Incledon; "and, indeed," he added, after a pause, "what you say is a great relief, for I had begun to fear that so young a creature might have found out that she had been too hasty—that she did not know her own mind."

"It is not her mind, but her nerves and temperament," said the mother. "I shall leave her quite quiet for a few days."

“And must I leave her quiet too?”

“I think so, if you don't mind. I could not tell you at the time,” said Mrs. Dame-rel, with absolute truth and candour such as give the best possible effect when used as accompaniments to the pious fib, “for I knew you would have wished to help us, and I could not have allowed it; but there have been a great many things to put up with. You don't know what it is to be left to the tender mercies of a maid-of-all-work, and Rose has had to soil her poor little fingers, as I never thought to see a child of mine do; it is no disgrace, especially when it is all over,” she added, with a little laugh.

“Disgrace!—it is nothing but honour,” said the lover, with some moisture starting into his eyes. He would have liked to

kiss the poor little fingers of which her mother spoke with playful tenderness, and went away comparatively happy, wondering whether there was not something more to do than he had originally thought of by which he could show his pride and delight and loving homage to his Rose.

Poor Mrs. Damerel! I am afraid it was very wicked of her, as a clergywoman who ought to show a good example to the world in general; and she could have whipped Rose all the same for thus leaving her in the lurch; but still it was clever, and a gift which most women have to exercise, more or less.

But oh! the terrors that overwhelmed her soul when, after having dismissed Mr. Incledon, thus wrapped over again in a false security, she bethought herself that

Rose had travelled to town in company with young Wodehouse; that they had been shut up for more than an hour together; that he had told his love-tale, and she had confided enough to him to leave him not hopeless at least. Other things might be made to arrange themselves; but what was to be done with the always rebellious girl, when the man she preferred—a young lover, impassioned and urgent—had come into the field?



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Rose found herself, after so strange and exciting a journey, within the tranquil shades of Miss Margetts' establishment for young ladies, it would be difficult to tell the dead hush which fell upon her. Almost before the door had closed upon Wodehouse, while still the rumble of the hansom in which he had brought her to her destination, and in which he now drove away, was in her ears, the hush, the chill, the tranquillity had begun to influence her.

Miss Margetts, of course, was not up at half-past six on the summer morning, and it was an early housemaid, curious, but drowsy, who admitted Rose, and took her, having some suspicion of so unusually early a visitor with so little luggage, to the bare and forbidding apartment in which Miss Margetts generally received her "parents." The window looked out upon the little garden in front of the house, and the high wall which enclosed it; and there Rose seated herself to wait, all the energy and passion which had sustained, beginning to fail her, and dreary doubts of what her old schoolmistress would say, and how she would receive her, filling her very soul.

How strange is the stillness of the morning within such a populated house!

nothing stirring but the faint far-off noises in the kitchen ; and the big blank room so silent about her, in which she felt like a prisoner, as if she had been shut in to undergo some sentence. To be sure, in other circumstances this was just the moment which Rose would have chosen to be alone, and in which the recollection of the scenes just ended, the words which she had heard, the looks that had been bent upon her, ought to have been enough to light up the dreariest place, and make her unconscious of external pallor and vacancy.

But although the warmest sense of personal happiness which she had ever known in her life had come upon the girl all unawares ere she came here, yet the circumstances were so strange, and the complica-

tion of feeling so great, that all the light seemed to die out of the landscape when Edward left her. This very joy which had come to her so unexpectedly gave a different aspect to all the rest of her story. To fly from a marriage which was disagreeable to her, with no warmer wish than that of simply escaping from it, was one thing; and to fly with the aid of a lover who made the flight an occasion of declaring himself was another and very different matter. Her heart sank while she thought of the story she had to tell. Should she dare tell Miss Margetts about Edward? About Mr. Incledon it seemed now simple enough.

Miss Margetts was a kind woman, or one of her "young ladies" would not have thought of flying back to her for shelter in trouble; but she was always a little rigid

and "particular," and when she heard Rose's story (with the careful exclusion of Edward) her mind was very much disturbed. She was sorry for the girl, but felt sure that her mother must be in the right, and trembled a little in the midst of her sympathy to consider what the world would think if she was found to receive girls who set themselves in opposition to their lawful guardians. "Was the gentleman not nice?" she asked, doubtfully; "was he very old? were his morals not what they ought to be? or has he any personal peculiarity which made him unpleasant? Except in the latter case, when indeed one must judge for one's self, I think you might have put full confidence in your excellent mother's judgment."

"Oh, it was not that; he is very good

and nice," said Rose, confused and troubled. "It is not that I object to him, it is because I do not love him. How could I marry him when I don't care for him? But he is not a man to whom anybody could object."

"And he is rich, and fond of you, and not too old? I fear—I fear, my dear child, you have been very inconsiderate. You would soon have learned to love so good a man."

"Oh, Miss Anne," said Rose (for there were two sisters and this was the youngest), "don't say so, please! I never could, if I should live a hundred years."

"You will not live a hundred years; but you might have tried. Girls are pliable—or at least people think so; perhaps my particular position in respect to them

makes me less sure of this than most people are ; but still that is the common idea. You would have learned to be fond of him if he was fond of you ; unless, indeed——”

“ Unless what ? ” cried Rose, intent upon suggestion of excuse.

“ Unless,” said Miss Margetts solemnly, fixing her with the penetrating glance of an eye accustomed to command——“ unless there is another gentleman in the case—— unless you have allowed another image to enter your heart ? ”

Rose was unprepared for such an appeal. She answered it only by one scared look, and hid her face in her hands.

“ Perhaps it will be best to have some breakfast,” said Miss Margetts. “ You must have been up very early to be here

so soon; and I daresay you did not take anything before you started, not even a cup of tea?"

Rose had to avow this lack of common prudence, and try to eat docilely to please her protector; but the attempt was not very successful. A single night's watching is often enough to upset a youthful frame not accustomed to anything of the kind, and Rose was glad beyond description to be taken to one of the little white-curtained chambers which were so familiar to her, and left there to rest. How inconceivable it was that she should be there again! Her very familiarity with everything made the wonder greater. Had she never left that still well-ordered place at all? or what strange current had drifted her back again? She lay down on



the little white dimity bed, much too deeply affected by her strange position, she thought, to rest; but ere long had fallen fast asleep, poor child, with her hands clasped across her breast, and tears trembling upon her eyelashes. Miss Margetts, being a kind soul, was deeply touched when she looked into the room and found her so, and immediately went back to her private parlour and scored an adjective or two out of the letter she had written—a letter to Rose's mother, telling how startled she was to find herself made unawares the confidant of the runaway, and begging Mrs. Damerel to believe that it was no fault of hers; though she assured her in the same breath that every attention should be paid to Rose's health and comfort. Mrs. Damerel would thus have been very soon

relieved from her suspense, even if she had not received the despairing little epistle sent to her by Rose. Of Rose's note, however, Mrs. Damerel took no immediate notice. She wrote to Miss Margetts, thanking her, and assuring her that she was only too glad to think that her child was in such good hands. But she did not write to Rose. No one wrote to Rose; she was left for three whole days without a word from without, for even Wodehouse did not venture to send the glowing epistles which he wrote by the score, having an idea that an establishment for young ladies is a kind of prison-house, in which such letters as his would never be suffered to reach their proper owner, and might prejudice her with her jailors. These dreary days were dreary enough for all of them—

for the mother, who was not so perfectly assured of being right in her mode of treatment as to be quite at ease on the subject ; for the young lover, burning with impatience, and feeling every day to be a year ; and for Rose herself, thus dropped into the stillness away from all that had excited and driven her desperate. For to be delivered all at once even out of trouble which is of an exciting and stimulating character, and buried in absolute quiet, is a doubtful advantage in any case, at least to youth.

Mr. Incledon bore the interval, not knowing all that was involved in it, with more calm than any of the others. He was quite amenable to Mrs. Damerel's advice not to disturb the girl with letters. After all what was a week, to a man secure of Rose's company for the

rest of his life? He smiled a little at the refuge which her mother's care (he thought) had chosen for her—her former school! and wondered how his poor little Rose liked it; but otherwise was perfectly tranquil on the subject. As for poor young Wodehouse, he was to be seen about the railway station, every train that arrived from London, and haunted the precincts of the White House for news, and was as miserable as a young man in love and terrible uncertainty, with only ten days in which to satisfy himself about his future life and happiness, could be. What wild thoughts went through his mind as he answered "yes" and "no" to his mother's talk, and dutifully took walks with her, and called with her upon her friends, hearing Rose's approaching marriage everywhere

talked of, and the "good luck" of the Rector's family remarked upon! His heart was tormented by all these conversations, yet it was better to hear them, than to be out of the way of hearing altogether. Gretna Green, if Gretna Green should be feasible, was the only way he could think of, to get himself delivered from this terrible complication; but then it haunted him that Gretna Green had been "done away with," though he could not quite remember how. Ten days! and then the China seas for three long years; though Rose had not been able to conceal from him that it was he whom she loved, and not Mr. Incledon. Poor fellow! in his despair he thought of deserting, of throwing up his appointment and losing all his chances in life; and all these wild thoughts swayed upwards to a

climax in the three days. He determined on the last of these that he could bear it no longer. He put a passionate letter in the post, and resolved to beard Mrs. Damerel in the morning and have it out.

More curious still, and scarcely less bewildering, was the strange trance of suspended existence in which Rose spent these three days. It was but two years since she had left Miss Margett's, and some of her friends were there still. She was glad to meet them, as much as she could be glad of anything in her preoccupied state, but felt the strangest difference—a difference which she was totally incapable of putting into words—between them and herself. Rose, without knowing it, had made a huge stride in life since she had left that bare school-room. I daresay her education

might with much advantage have been carried on a great deal longer than it was, and that her power of thinking might have increased, and her mind been much improved, had she been sent to college afterwards as boys are, and as some people think girls ought to be; but though she had not been to college, education of a totally different kind had been going on for Rose. She had made a step in life which carried her altogether beyond the placid region in which the other girls lived and worked. She was in the midst of problems which Euclid cannot touch, nor logic solve. She had to exercise choice in a matter concerning other lives as well as her own. She had to decide unaided between a true and a false moral duty and to make up her mind which was true and which was false. She

had to discriminate in which points inclination ought to be considered a rule of conduct, and in which points it ought to be crushed as mere self-seeking: or whether it should not always be crushed, which was her mother's code—or if it ought to have supreme weight, which was her father's practice. This is not the kind of training which youth can get from schools, whether in Miss Margetts' establishment for young ladies, or even in learned Balliol. Rose, who had been subjected to it, felt, but could not tell why, as if she were years and worlds removed from the school and its duties. She could scarcely help smiling at the elder girls with their "deep" studies and their books, which were far more advanced intellectually than Rose. Oh, how easy the hardest grammar was, the



difficulties of Goethe, or of Dante (or even of Thucydides or Perseus, but these she did not know), in comparison with this difficulty which tore her asunder! Even the moral and religious truths in which she had been trained from her cradle scarcely helped her. The question was one to be decided for herself and by herself, and by her for her alone.

And here is the question, dear reader, as the girl had to decide it. Self-denial is the rule of Christianity. It is the highest and noblest of duties when exercised for a true end. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." Thus it has the highest sanction which any duty can have, and it is the very life and breath and essence of Christianity. This being the rule, is there one

special case excepted in which you ought not to deny yourself? and is this case the individual one of Marriage? Allowing that in all other matters it is right to sacrifice your own wishes where by doing so you can benefit others, is it right to sacrifice your love and happiness in order to please your friends, and make a man happy who loves you, but whom you do not love? According to Mrs. Damerel this was so, and the sacrifice of a girl who made a loveless marriage for a good purpose, was as noble as any other martyrdom for the benefit of country or family or race. Gentle reader, if you do not skip the statement of the question altogether you will probably decide it summarily, and wonder at Rose's doubt. But hers was no such easy way of dealing with the problem,

which I agree with her in thinking is much harder than anything in Euclid. She was not by any means sure that this amount of self-sacrifice was not a duty. Her heart divined, her very intellect felt, without penetrating it, a fallacy somewhere in the argument; but still the argument was very potent and not to be got over. She was not sure that to listen to Edward Wodehouse, and to suffer even an unguarded reply to drop from her lips, was not a sin. She was far from being sure that in any case it is safe or right to do what you like; and to do what you like in contradiction to your mother, to your engagement, to your plighted word—what could that be but a sin? She employed all her simple logic on the subject with little effect, for in strict logic she was bound over to

marry Mr. Incledon, and now more than ever her heart resolved against marrying Mr. Incledon. This question worked in her mind, presenting itself in every possible phase—now one side, now the other. And she dared not consult any one near, and none of those at a distance who were interested in its solution took any notice of her. She was left alone in unbroken stillness to make her own conclusion, to judge entirely for herself.

The first day she was still occupied with the novelty of her position—the fatigue and excitement of leaving home, and of all that had occurred since. The second day she was still strangely moved by the difference between her and her old friends, and the sense of having passed beyond them into regions unknown to their philosophy,

and from which she never could come back to the unbroken tranquillity of a girl's life. But on the third day the weight of her strange position weighed her down utterly. She watched the distribution of the letters with eyes growing twice their natural size, and a pang indescribable at her heart. Did they mean to leave her alone then? to take no further trouble about her? to let her do as she liked, that melancholy privilege which is prized only by those who do not possess it? Had Edward forgotten her though he had said so much two days ago? had her mother cast her off, disowning her, as a rebel? Even Mr. Incledon, was he going to let her be lost to him without an effort? Rose had fled hoping (she believed) for nothing so much as to lose herself and be heard of no

more ; but oh ! the heaviness which drooped over her very soul and life when for three days she was left alone. Wonder, consternation, indignation, arose one after another in her heart. They had all abandoned her. The lover whom she loved, and the lover whom she did not love, alike ; what was love then ? a mere fable, a thing which perished when the object of it was out of sight ? When she had time to think, indeed, she found this theory untenable, for had not Edward been faithful to her at the other end of the world ? and yet what did he mean now ?

On the third night Rose threw herself on her bed in despair, and sobbed till midnight. Then a mighty resolution arose in her mind. She would relieve herself of the burden. She would go to the fountain-

head, to Mr. Incledon himself, and lay the whole long tale before him. He was good, he was just, he had always been kind to her; she would abide by what he said. If he insisted that she should marry him she must do so; better that than to be thrown off by everybody,) to be left for days or perhaps for years alone in Miss Margetts'. And if he were generous, and decided otherwise! In that case neither Mrs. Damerel nor any one else could have anything to say—she would put the whole matter into his hands.

She had her hat on when she came down to breakfast next morning, and her face, though pale, had a little resolution in it, better than the despondency of the first three days. "I am going home," she said, as the schoolmistress looked at her surprised.

“It is the very best thing you can do, my dear,” said Miss Margetts, giving her a more cordial kiss than usual. “I did not like to advise it; but it is the very best thing you can do.”

Rose took her breakfast meekly, not so much comforted as Miss Margetts had intended by this approval. Somehow she felt as if it must be against her own interest since Miss Margetts approved of it, and she was in twenty minds not to go. When the letters came in she said to herself that there could be none for her, and went and stood at the window, turning her back that she might not see; and it was while she was standing thus, pretending to gaze out upon the high wall covered with ivy, that, in the usual contradiction of human affairs, Edward Wodehouse's im-



passioned letter was put into her hands. There she read how he too had made up his mind not to bear it longer ; how he was going to her mother to have an explanation with her. Should she wait for the result of this explanation, or should she carry out her own determination and go ?

“Come, Rose, I will see you safely to the station ; there is a cab at the door,” said Miss Margetts.

Rose turned round, her eyes dewy and moist with those tears of love and consolation which refresh and do not scorch as they come. She looked up timidly to see whether she might ask leave to stay ; but the cab was waiting, and Miss Margetts was ready, and her own hat on and intention declared ; she was ashamed to turn back when she had gone so far. She said good-

bye accordingly to the elder sister, and meekly followed Miss Anne into the cab. Had it been worth while winding herself up to the resolution of flight for so little? Was her first experiment of resistance really over, and the rebel going home, with arms grounded and banners trailing? It was ignominious beyond all expression, but what was she to do?

“My dear,” said Miss Margetts, in the cab, which jolted very much and now and then took away her breath, “I hope you are going with your mind in a better frame, and disposed to pay attention to what your good mother says. *She* must know best. Try and remember this, whatever happens. You ought to say it to yourself all the way down as a penance, ‘My mother knows best.’”

“But how can she know best what I am feeling?” said Rose. “It must be myself who must judge of that.”

“You may be sure she knows a great deal more, and has given more thought to it than you suppose,” said the schoolmistress. “Dear child, make me happy by promising that you will follow her advice.”

Rose made no promise, but her heart sank as she thus set out upon her return journey. It was less terrible when she found herself alone in the railway carriage; and yet it was more terrible as she realised what desperation had driven her to. She was going back as she went away with no question decided, no resolution come to, with only new complications to encounter, without the expedient of flight, which could not be repeated. Ought she not to have

been more patient, to have tried to put up with even silence? that could not have lasted for ever; but now she was going to put herself back in the very heart of the danger, with no ground gained, but something lost. Well! she said to herself, at least it would be over. She would know the worst, and there would be no further appeal against it. If happiness was over too, she would have nothing to do in all the life before her—nothing to do but to mourn over the loss of it, and teach herself to do without it; and suspense would be over. She got out of the carriage, drawing her veil over her face, and took an unfrequented path which led away across the fields to the road near Whitton, quite out of reach of the Green and all its inhabitants. It was a long walk, but the air and the move-

ment did her good. She went on swiftly and quietly, her whole mind bent upon the interview she was going to seek. All beyond was a blank to her; this one thing, evident and definite, seemed to fix and to clear her dazzled eyesight. She met one or two acquaintances, but they did not recognise her through her veil, though she saw them, and recollected them ever after, as having had something to do with that climax and agony of her youth; and thus Rose reached Whitton, amid its soft abundant summer woods, and, her heart beating louder and louder, hastened her steps as she drew near her destination, almost running across the park to Mr. Incledon's door.

## CHAPTER VII.

“**R**OSE! is it possible?” he cried.

She was standing in the midst of that great, luxurious, beautiful drawing-room, of which he hoped she was to be the queen and mistress, her black dress breaking harshly upon all the soft harmony of neutral tints around. Her face, which he saw in the glass as he entered the room, was framed in the large veil which she had thrown back over her hat, and which drooped down on her shoulders on either side. She was quite pale—her cheeks blanched out of

all trace of colour, with something of that chilled and spiritual light in them which sometimes appears in the colourless clearness of the sky after a storm. Her eyes were larger than usual, and had a dilated, exhausted look. Her face was full of a speechless, silent eagerness—eagerness which could wait, yet was almost beyond the common artifices of concealment. Her hands were softly clasped together, with a certain eloquence in their close pressure, supporting each other.

All this Mr. Incledon saw in the glass before he could see her; and, though he went in with lively and joyful animation, this sight startled him a little. He came forward, however, quite cheerfully, though his heart failed him, and took the clasped hands into his.

“I did not look for such a bright interruption to a dull morning,” he said; “but what a double pleasure it is to see you here! How good of you to come to bring me the happy news of your return!”

“Mr. Incledon,” she said hastily, “oh! do not be glad—don’t say I am good. I have come to you first without seeing mamma. I have come to say a great deal—a very great deal—to you; and to ask—your advice; and if you will tell me—what to do.”

Her voice sank quite low before these final words were said.

“My darling,” he said, “you are very serious and solemn. What can you want advice about? But, whatever it is, you have a right to the very best I can give



you. Let me hear what the difficulty is. Here is a chair for you—one of your own choice, the new ones. Tell me if you think it comfortable; and then tell me what this terrible difficulty is.”

“Oh, don’t take it so lightly,” said Rose —“please don’t! I am very, very unhappy, and I have determined to tell you everything and to let you judge for me. You have the best right.”

“Thanks for saying so,” he said, with a smile, kissing her hand.

He thought she meant that as she was so surely his, it was naturally his part to think for her and help her in everything. What so natural? And then he awaited her disclosure, still smiling, expecting some innocent dilemma, such as would be in keeping with her innocent looks. He

could not understand her, nor the gravity of the appeal to him which she had come to make.

“Oh, Mr. Incledon!” cried Rose, “if you knew what I mean you would not smile—you would not take it so easily. I have come to tell you everything—how I have lied to you and been a cheat and a deceiver. Oh! don’t laugh—you don’t know, you don’t know how serious it is!”

“Nay, dear child,” he said, “do you want to frighten me? for if you do, you must think of something more likely than that you are a cheat and deceiver. Come now, I will be serious—as serious as a judge. Tell me what it is, Rose.”

“It is—about you and me,” she said, suddenly, after a little pause.

“Ah!”—this startled him for the first

time. His grasp tightened upon her hand ; but he used no more endearing words. "Go on," he said, softly.

"May I begin at the beginning? I should like to tell you everything," she said, making a sudden breathless plunge into the midst of her story. "When you first spoke to me, Mr. Incledon, I told you there was some one—"

"Ah!" cried Mr. Incledon, again, still more sharply, "he is here now. You have seen him since he came back?"

"It is not that," said Rose. "Oh! let me tell you from the beginning! I said then that he had never said anything to me. I could not tell you his name because I did not know what his feelings were—only my own, of which I was ashamed. Mr. Incledon, have patience

with me a little. Just before he went away, a year ago, he came to the Rectory to say good-bye. He sent up a message to ask me to come down, but mamma went down instead. Then his mother sent me a little note, begging me to go to bid him good-bye. It was while papa was ill. He held my hand, and would not let me. I begged him, only for a minute; but he held my hand and would not let me go. I had to sit there and listen, and hear the door open and shut, and then steps in the hall and on the gravel, and then mamma coming slowly back again, as if nothing had happened, upstairs and along the corridor. Oh! I thought she was walking on my heart."

Rose's eyes were so full that she did not see how her listener looked. He held her

hand still, but with his disengaged hand he partially covered his face.

“Then after that,” she resumed, pausing for breath, “all our trouble came. I did not seem to care for anything. It is dreadful to say it—and I never did say it till now—but I don’t think I felt so unhappy as I ought about poor papa; I was so unhappy before. It did not break my heart as grief ought to do. I was only dull—dull—miserable, and did not care for anything; but then everybody was unhappy, and there was good reason for it, and no one thought of me. It went on like that till you came.”

Here he stirred a little, and grasped her hand more tightly. What she had said hitherto had not been pleasant to him; but yet all this had occurred before he had made

his appearance as her suitor ; it was all innocent, visionary—the very romance of youthful liking. Such an early dream of the dawning any man, even the most rigid, might forgive to his bride.

“You came; oh! Mr. Incledon, do not be angry!—I want to tell you everything. If it vexes you and hurts you, will you mind? You came; and mamma told me that same night. Oh, how frightened I was and miserable! Everything seemed to turn round with me. She said you loved me, and that you were very good and very kind (but that I knew), and would do so much for the boys, and be a comfort and help to her in our great poverty——”

At these words he stirred again, and loosened, but did not quite let go, his grasp of her hand. Rose was, without knowing

it, acting like a skilful surgeon, cutting deep and sharp, that the pain might be over the sooner. He leaned his head on his other hand, turning it away from her, and from time to time stirred unconsciously when the sting was too much for him, but did not speak.

“And she said more than this. Oh! Mr. Incledon, I must tell you everything, as if you were my own heart! She told me that papa had not been—considerate for us, as he should have been; that he liked his own way and his own pleasure best; and that I was following him—that I was doing the same—ruining the boys’ prospects, and prolonging our poverty, because I did not want to marry you—though you had promised to help them, and set everything right.”

Mr. Incledon dropped Rose's fingers ; he turned half away from her, supporting his head upon both his hands, so that she did not see his face. She did not know how cruel she was, nor did she mean to be cruel, but simply historical, telling him everything, as if she had been speaking to her own heart.

“ Then I saw you,” said Rose, “ and told you—or else I thought I told you ; and you did not mind, but would not, though I begged you, give up. And everything went on for a long, long time. Sometimes I was very wretched ; sometimes my heart felt quite dull, and I did not seem to mind what happened. Sometimes I forgot for a little while—and, oh ! Mr. Incledon, now and then, though I tried very hard, I could not help thinking of



—him. I never did when I could help it; but sometimes, when I saw the lights on Ankermead, or remembered something that he had said—And all this time mamma would talk to me of people who preferred their own will to the happiness of others; of all the distress and misery it brought when we indulged ourselves, and our whims and fancies; of how much better it was to do what was right than what we liked. My head got confused sometimes, and I felt as if she must be wrong, but I could not put it into words; for how could it be right to deceive a good man like you—to let you give your love for nothing, and marry you without caring for you? But I am not clever enough to argue with mamma. Once, I think, for a minute, I got the better of her; but when

she told me that I was preferring my own will to everybody's happiness, it went to my heart, and what could I say? Do you remember the day when it was all settled at last, and made up?"

This was more than the poor man could bear. He put up one hand with a wild gesture to stop her, and uttered a hoarse exclamation; but Rose was too absorbed in her story to stop.

"The night before I had gone down into the Rectory garden, where he and I used to talk, and there I said good-bye to him in my heart, and made a kind of grave over him, and gave him up for ever and ever—oh! don't you know how?" said Rose, the tears dropping on her black dress. "Then I was willing that it should be settled how you pleased; and I never,

never allowed myself to think of him any more. When he came into my head I went to the schoolroom, or I took a hard piece of music, or I talked to mamma, or heard Patty her lessons. I would not, because I thought it would be wicked to you—and you so good to me, Mr. Incledon! Oh! if you had only been my brother, or my cousin (she had almost said father or uncle, but, by good luck, forebore), how fond I should have been of you!—and I am fond of you,” said Rose, softly proffering the hand which he had put away, and laying it gently upon his arm.

He shook his head, and made a little gesture as if to put it off; but yet the touch and the words went to his heart.

“Now comes the worst of all,” said Rose. “I know it will hurt you, and yet

I must tell you. After that there came the news of Uncle Edward's death, and that he had left his money to us, and that we were well off again—better than we had ever been. Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" she said, clasping his arm with both her hands, "when I heard it, it seemed to me all in a moment that I was free. Mamma said that all the sacrifices we had been making would be unnecessary henceforward; what she meant was the things we had been doing—dusting the rooms, putting the table straight, helping in the house—oh! as if these could be called sacrifices! But I thought she meant me. You are angry!—you are angry!" said Rose. "I could not expect anything else. But it was not you, Mr. Incledon; it was that I hated to be married. I could not—could

not make up my mind to it. I turned into a different creature when I thought I was free."

The simplicity of the story disarmed the man, sharp and bitter as was the sting and mortification of listening to this too artless tale.

"Poor child! poor child!" he murmured in a softer tone, unclasping the delicate fingers from his arm; and then, with an effort—"I am not angry. Go on; let me hear it to the end."

"When mamma saw how glad I was, she stopped it all at once," said Rose, controlling herself. "She said I was just the same as ever—always self-indulgent, thinking of myself, not of others—and that I was as much bound as ever by honour. There was no longer any ques-

tion of the boys, or of help to the family ; but she said honour was just as much to be considered, and that I had pledged my word——”

“Rose,” quietly said Mr. Incledon, “spare me what you can of these discussions—you had pledged your word?”

She drew away half-frightened, not expecting the harsher tone in his voice, though she had expected him to “be angry,” as she said.

“Forgive me,” she went on, subdued, “I was so disappointed that it made me wild. I did not know what to do. I could not see any reason for it now—any good in it; and, at last, when I was almost crazy with thinking, I—ran away.”

“You ran away!”—Mr. Incledon raised his head, indignant. “Your mother has

lied all round!" he said, fiercely; then, bethinking himself—"I beg your pardon. Mrs. Damerel no doubt had her reasons for what she said."

"There was only one place I could go to," said Rose, timidly, "Miss Margetts', where I was at school. I went up to the station for the early train, that nobody might see me. I was very much frightened. Some one was standing there; I did not know who he was—he came by the train, I think; but after I had got into the carriage he came in after me. Mr. Inledon! it was not his fault, neither his nor mine. I had not been thinking of him. It was not for him, but only not to be married—to be free——"

"Of me," he said, with a bitter smile; "but, in short, you went, whether by in-

tention or not—and Mr. Wodehouse took advantage of his opportunities ?”

“He told me,” said Rose, not looking at Mr. Incedon, “what I had known ever so long without being told; but I said nothing to him; what could I say? I told him all that had happened. He took me to Miss Margetts’, and there we parted,” said Rose, with a momentary pause and a deep sigh. “Since then I have done nothing but think and think. No one has come near me—no one has written to me. I have been left alone to go over and over it all in my own mind. I have done so till I was nearly mad—or at least, everything seemed going round with me, and everything got confused, and I could not tell what was right and what was wrong. “Oh!” cried Rose, lifting her



head in natural eloquence, with eyes which looked beyond him, and a certain elevation and abstraction in her face, "I don't think it is a thing in which only right and wrong are to be considered. When you love one, and do not love another, it must mean something; and to marry unwillingly, that is nothing to content a man. It is a wrong to him; it is not doing right; it is treating him unkindly, cruelly! It is as if he wanted you, anyhow, like a cat or a dog; not as if he wanted you worthily, as his companion." Rose's courage failed her after this little outburst; her high looks came down, her voice sank and faltered, her head drooped. She rose up, and clasping her hands together, went on in low tones: "Mr. Incledon, I am engaged to you; I belong to you. I trust your

justice and your kindness more than any one. If you say I am to marry you, I will do it. Take it now into your own hands. If I think of it any more I shall go mad ; but I will do whatever you say."

He was walking up and down the room, with his face averted, and with pain and anger and humiliation in his heart. All this time he had believed he was leading Rose towards the reasonable love for him which was all he hoped for. He had supposed himself in almost a lofty position, offering to this young, fresh, simple creature more in every way than she could ever have had but for him—a higher position, a love more noble than any foolish boy-and-girl attachment. To find out all in a moment how very different the real state of the case had been, and to have conjured

up before him the picture of a martyr-girl, weeping and struggling, and a mother "with a host of petty maxims preaching down her daughter's heart," was intolerable to him. He had never been so mortified, so humbled in all his life. He walked up and down the room in a ferment, with that sense of the unbearable which is so bitter. Unbearable!—yet to be borne somehow; a something not to be ignored or cast off. It said much for Rose's concluding appeal that he heard it at all, and took in the meaning of it in his agitation and hot indignant rage; but he did hear it, and it touched him. "If you say I am to marry you I will do it." He stopped short in his impatient walk. Should he say it—in mingled despite and love, and keep her to her word? He came up to her and took

her clasped hands within his, more in anger than in tenderness, and looked her in the face.

“If I say you are to marry me, you will do it? You pledge yourself to that? You will marry me, if I please?”

“Yes,” said Rose, very pale, looking up at him steadfastly. She neither trembled nor hesitated. She had gone beyond any superficial emotion.

Then he stooped and kissed her with a passion which was rough—almost brutal. Rose’s pale face flushed, and her slight figure wavered like a reed; but she neither shrank nor complained. He had a right to dictate to her—she had put it into his hands. The look of those large innocent eyes, from which all conflict had departed, which had grown abstract in their wistful-

ness, holding fast at least by one clear duty, went to his heart. He kept looking at her, but she did not quail. She had no thought but her word, and to do what she had said.

“Rose,” he said, “you are a cheat, like all women. You come to me with this face, and insult me and stab me—and say you will do what I tell you, and stand there, looking at me with innocent eyes like an angel. How could you find it in your heart—if you have a heart—to tell me all this? How dare you put that dainty little cruel foot of yours upon my neck, and scorn and torture me—how dare you!—how dare you!”

There came a glimmer into his eyes, as if it might have been some moisture forced up by means beyond his control; and he

held her hands with such force that it seemed to Rose he shook her, whether willingly or not. But she did not shrink. She looked up at him, her eyes growing more and more wistful, and though he hurt her, did not complain.

“It was that you might know all the truth,” she said, almost under her breath. “Now you know everything and can judge—and I will do as you say.”

He held her so for a minute longer, which seemed eternity to Rose; then he let her hands drop and turned away.

“It is not you who are to blame,” he said, “not you, but your mother, who would have sold you. Good God!—do all women traffic in their own flesh and blood?”

“Do not say so!” cried Rose, with sud-

den tears—"you shall not! I will not hear it! She has been wrong; but that was not what she meant."

Mr. Incledon laughed—his mood seemed to have changed all in a moment.

"Come," he said, "Rose. Perhaps it is not quite decorous for you, a young lady, to be here alone. Come! I will take you to your mother; and then you shall hear what I have got to say."

She walked out of the great house by his side as if she had been in a dream. What did he mean? The suspense became terrible to her; for she could not guess what he would say. Her poor little feet twisted over each other, and she stumbled and staggered with weakness as she went along beside him—stumbled so much that he made her take his arm, and led her

carefully along, with now and then a kind but meaningless word. Before they entered the White House, Rose was leaning almost her whole weight upon his supporting arm. The world was swimming and floating around, the trees going in circles, now above, now below her, she thought. She was but half conscious when she went in, falling on the threshold, to the little hall, all bright with Mr. Incledon's flowers. Was she to be his, too, like one of them—a flower to carry about wherever he went, passive and helpless as one of the plants—past resistance, almost past suffering? “I am afraid she is ill; take care of her, Agatha,” said Mr. Incledon, to her sister, who came rushing open-mouthed and open-eyed; and, leaving her there, he strode unannounced into the drawing-room, to



meet the real author of his discomfiture, an antagonist more worthy of his steel, and against whom he could use his weapons with less compunction than against the submissive Rose.

Mrs. Damerel had been occupied all the morning with Mr. Nolan, who had obeyed her summons on the first day of Rose's flight, but whom she had dismissed when she ascertained where her daughter was, assuring him that to do nothing was the best policy, as indeed it had proved to be. The Curate had gone home that evening obedient; but moved by the electrical impulse which seemed to have set all minds interested in Rose, in motion on that special day, had come back this morning to urge her mother to go to her, or to allow him to go to her. Mr. Nolan's presence had fur-

nished an excuse to Mrs. Damerel for declining to receive poor young Wodehouse, who had asked to see her immediately after breakfast. She was discussing even then with the Curate how to get rid of him, what to say to him, and what it was best to do to bring Rose back to her duty.

"I can't see so clear as you do that it is her duty—in all the circumstances," the Curate had said, doubtfully.

"What have circumstances to do with a matter of right and wrong—of truth and honour?" cried Mrs. Damerel; "she must keep her word."

It was at this precise moment of the conversation that Mr. Incledon appeared; and I suppose she must have seen something in his aspect and the expression of

his face that showed some strange event had happened. Mrs. Damerel gave a low cry, and the muscles of Mr. Incledon's mouth were moved by one of those strange contortions which in such cases are supposed to do duty for a smile. He bowed low, with a mock reverence to Mr. Nolan, but did not put out his hand.

"I presume," he said, "that this gentleman is in the secret of my humiliation, as well as the rest of the family, and that I need not hesitate to say what I have to say before him. It is pleasant to think that so large a circle of friends interest themselves in my affairs."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Damerel. "Your humiliation! have you sustained any humiliation? I do not know what you mean."

“Oh ! I can make it very clear,” he said, with the same smile. “Your daughter has been with me. I have just brought her home.”

“What ! Rose ?” said Mrs. Damerel, starting to her feet ; but he stopped her before she could make a step.

“Do not go,” he said ; “it is more important that you should stay here. What have I done to you that you should have thus humbled me to the dust ? Did I ask you to sell her to me ? Did I want a wife for hire ? Should I have authorized any one to persecute an innocent girl, and drive her almost mad for me ? Good heavens, for me ! Think of it, if you can. Am I the sort of man to be forced on a girl—to be married as a matter of duty ?

How dared you—how dared anyone insult me so ?”

Mrs. Damerel, who had risen to her feet, sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. I do not think she had ever once taken into consideration this side of the question.

“Mr. Incledon,” she stammered, “you have been misinformed; you are mistaken. Indeed, indeed it is not so.”

“Misinformed !” he cried ; “mistaken ! I have my information from the very fountainhead—from the poor child who has been all but sacrificed to this supposed commercial transaction between you and me, which I disown altogether for my part. I never made such a bargain, nor thought of it. I never asked to buy your Rose.

I might have won her, perhaps," he added, calming himself with an effort, "if you had let us alone ; or I should have discovered at once that it was labour lost. Look here. We have been friends, and I never thought of you till to-day but with respect and kindness. How could you put such an affront on me ?"

"Gently, gently," said Mr. Nolan, growing red ; "you go too far, sir. If Mrs. Damerel has done wrong, it was a mistake of the judgment, not of the heart."

"The heart !" he cried, contemptuously ; "how much heart was there in it ? On poor Rose's side, a broken one ; on mine, a thing deceived and deluded. Pah ! do not speak to me of hearts or mistakes ; I am too deeply mortified—too much wronged for that."

“Mr. Incledon,” said Mrs. Damerel, rising, pale yet self-possessed, “I may have done wrong, as you say; but what I have done, I did for my child’s advantage and for yours. You were told she did not love you, but you persevered; and I believed, and believe still, that when she knew you better—when she was your wife—she would love you. I may have pressed her too far; but it was no more a commercial transaction—no more a sale of my daughter,” she said, with a burning flush coming over her face—“no more than this. You do me as much wrong as you say I have done you—— Rose! Rose!”

Rose came in, followed by Agatha, with her hat off, which showed more clearly the waste which emotion and fatigue, weary

anxiety, waiting, abstinence, and mental suffering had worked upon her face. She had her hands clasped loosely yet firmly, in the attitude which had become habitual to her, and a pale smile, like the wannest of winter sunshine on her face. She came up very quietly, and stood between the two, like a ghost, Agatha said, who stood trembling behind her.

“Mamma, do not be angry,” she said, softly; “I have told him everything, and I am quite ready to do whatever he decides. In any case he ought to know everything, for it is he who is most concerned—he and I.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTAIN WODEHOUSE did not get admission to the White House that day until the afternoon. He was not to be discouraged, though the messages he got were of a depressing nature enough. "Mrs. Damerel was engaged, and could not see him; would he come later?" "Mrs. Damerel was still engaged—more engaged than ever." And while Mary Jane held the door ajar, Edward heard a voice raised high, with an indignant tone, speaking continuously, which was the

voice of Mr. Incledon, though he did not identify it. Later still, Mrs. Damerel was still engaged; but, as he turned despairing from the door, Agatha rushed out, with excited looks, and with a message that if he came back at three o'clock her mother would see him.

"Rose has come home, and oh! there has been such a business," Agatha whispered into his ear before she rushed back again.

She knew a lover, and especially a favoured lover, by instinct, as some girls do; and Agatha had the advantage of always knowing her own mind, and never would be the centre of any imbroglio, like the unfortunate Rose.

"Are you going back to the White House again?" said Mrs. Wodehouse. "I

wonder how you can be so servile, Edward. I would not go, hat in hand, to any girl if I were you; and when you know that she is engaged to another man, and he a great deal better off than you are! How can you show so little spirit? There are more Roses in the garden than one, and sweeter Roses and richer, would be glad to have you. If I had thought you had so little proper pride, I should never have wished you to come here."

"I don't think I have any proper pride," said Edward, trying to make a feeble joke of it; "I have to come home now and then to know what it means."

"You were not always so poor-spirited," said his mother; "it is that silly girl who has turned your head. And she is not even there; she has gone up to town to

get her trousseau and choose her wedding silks, so they say ; and you may be sure, if she is engaged like that, she does not want to be reminded of you."

"I suppose not," said Edward, drearily ; "but as I promised to go back, I think I must. I ought, at least, to bid them good-bye."

"Oh ! if that is all," said Mrs. Wodehouse, pacified, "go, my dear ; and mind you put the very best face upon it. Don't look as if it were anything to you ; congratulate them, and say that you are glad to hear that anyone so nice as Mr. Inledon is to be the gentleman. Oh ! if I were in your place, I should know what to say ! I should give Miss Rose something to remember. I should tell her I hoped she would be happy in her grand

house, and was glad to hear that the settlements were everything they ought to be. She would feel that, you may be sure ; for a girl that sets up for romance and poetry and all that, don't like to be supposed mercenary. She should not soon forget her parting with me."

"Do you think I wish to hurt and wound her?" said Edward. "Surely no. If she is happy, I will wish her more happiness. She has never harmed me—no, mother. It cannot do a man any harm, even if it makes him unhappy, to think of a woman as I think of Rose."

"Oh! you have no spirit!" cried Mrs. Wodehouse; "I don't know how a son of mine can take it so easily. Rose, indeed! Her very name makes my blood boil!"

But Edward's blood was very far from boiling as he walked across the Green for the third time that day. The current of life ran cold and low in him. The fiery determination of the morning to "have it out" with Mrs. Damerel, and know his fate and Rose's fate, had fallen into a despairing resolution at least to see her for the last time, to bid her forget everything that had passed, and try himself to forget. If her fate was sealed, and no longer in her own power to alter, that was all a generous man could do; and he felt sure, from the voices he had heard, and from the air of agitation about the house, and from Agatha's hasty communication, that this day had been a crisis to more than himself.

He met Mr. Incledon as he approached

the house. His rival looked at him gravely without a smile, and passed him with an abrupt "Good morning." Mr. Incledon had not the air of a triumphant lover, and there was something of impatience and partial offence in his look as his eyes lingered for a moment on the young sailor. So it appeared to Edward, though I think it was rather regret, and a certain wistful envy that was in Mr. Incledon's eyes. This young fellow, not half so clever, or so cultivated, or so important as himself, had won the prize which he had tried for and failed. The baffled man was still disturbed by unusual emotion, and he was not ungenerous in his sentiments; but then the other believed that he himself was the failure, and that Mr. Incledon had succeeded, and interpreted his looks, as we

all do, according to the commentary in our own minds.

He went on more depressed than ever after this meeting. Just outside the White House he encountered Mr. Nolan, going out to walk with the children.

“Now that the gale is over, the little boats are going out for a row,” said the Curate, looking at him with a smile. It was not like Mr. Nolan’s usual good-nature, poor Edward thought.

He was ushered in at once to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Damerel sat in a great chair, leaning back, with a look of weakness and exhaustion quite out of keeping with her usual energy. She held out her hand to him without rising. Her eyes were red, as if she had been shedding tears, and there was a flush upon her face.



Altogether, her appearance bewildered him; no one in the world had ever seen Mrs. Damerel looking like this before.

“I am afraid you will think me importunate, coming so often,” he said, “but I felt that I must see you. Not that I come with much hope; but still it is better to know the very worst, if there is no good to hear.”

“It depends on what you think worst or best,” she said. “Mr. Wodehouse, you told me you were promoted—you are captain now, and you have a ship?”

“Commander; and, alas! under orders for China, with ten days more leave,” he said, with a faint smile; “though perhaps, on the whole, that may be best. Mrs. Damerel, may I not ask—for Rose? Pardon me for calling her so—I can’t

think of her otherwise. If it is all settled and made up, and my poor chance over, may I not see her, only for a few minutes? If you think what a dismal little story mine has been—sent away without seeing her a year ago, then raised into sudden hope by our chance meeting the other morning, and now, I suppose, sentenced to banishment for ever——”

“Stay a little,” she said; “I have had a very exciting day, and I am much worn out. Must you go in ten days?”

“Alas!” said Wodehouse, “and even my poor fortnight got with such difficulty; though perhaps, on the whole, it is better, Mrs. Damerel.”

“Yes,” she said, “have patience a moment; things have turned out very differently from what I wished. I cannot

pretend to be pleased—scarcely resigned—to what you have all done between you. You have nothing to offer my daughter—nothing! and she has nothing to contribute on her side. It is all selfish inclination—what you liked, not what was best—that has swayed you. You had not self-denial enough to keep silent; she had not self-denial enough to consider that this is not a thing for a day, but for life; and the consequences, I suppose, as usual, will fall upon me. All my life I have had nothing to do but toil to make up for the misfortunes caused by self-indulgence. Others have had their will and pleasure, and I have paid the penalty. I thought for once it might have been different, but I have been mistaken, as you see.”

“You forget that I have no clue to

your meaning, that you are speaking in riddles," said Wodehouse, whose depressed heart had begun to rise and flutter and thump against his young breast.

"Ah! that is true," said Mrs. Damerel, rising, with a sigh. "Well, I wash my hands of it; and for the rest, you will prefer to hear that from Rose rather than from me."

He stood in the middle of the room speechless when she closed the door behind her, and heard her soft steps going in regular measure through the still house, as Rose had heard them once. How still it was! the leaves fluttering at the open window, the birds singing, Mrs. Damerel's footsteps sounding fainter, his heart beating louder. But he had not very long to wait.

Mr. Nolan and the children went out on the river, and rowed up that long lovely reach past Alfredsbury, skirting the bank, which was pink with branches of the wild rose, and sweet with the feathery flowers of the Queen of the Meadows. Dick flattered himself that he pulled an excellent bow, and the Curate, who loved the children's chatter, and themselves, humoured the boy to the top of his bent. Agatha steered, and felt it an important duty, and Patty, who had nothing else to do, leaned her weight over the side of the boat, and did her best to capsize it, clutching at the wild roses and the meadow-queen. They shipped their oars, and floated down with the stream when they had gone as far as they cared to go, and went up the hill again to the White House in a perfect

bower of wild flowers, though the delicate rose blossoms began to droop in the warm grasp of the children before they got home. When they rushed in, flooding the house all through and through with their voices and their joyous breath and their flowers, they found all the rooms empty, the drawing-room silent, in a green repose, and not a creature visible. But while Agatha rushed upstairs, calling upon her mother and Rose, Mr. Nolan saw a sight from the window which set his mind at rest. Two young figures together, one leaning on the other—two heads bent close, talking too low for any hearing but their own. The Curate looked at them with a smile and a sigh. They had attained the height of blessedness ; what better could the world give them ? And yet

the good Curate's sigh was not all for the disappointed, nor his smile for their happiness alone.

The lovers were happy ; but there are drawbacks to all mortal felicity. The fact that Edward had but nine days left, and that their fate must after that be left in obscurity, was, as may be supposed, a very serious drawback to their happiness. But their good fortune did not forsake them ; or rather, to speak more truly, the disappointed lover did not forsake the girl who had appealed to him, who had mortified and tortured him, and promised with all the unconscious cruelty of innocence to marry him if he told her to do so.

Mr. Incledon went straight to town from the White House, intent on finishing the work he had begun. He had imposed

on Mrs. Damerel as a duty to him, as a recompense for all that he had suffered at her hands, the task of receiving Wodehouse, and sanctioning the love which her daughter had given; and he went up to town to the Admiralty, to his friend whose unfortunate leniency had permitted the young sailor to return home. Mr. Inledon treated the matter lightly, making a joke of it.

“I told you he was not to come home, but to be sent off as far as possible,” he said.

“Why, what harm could the poor young fellow do in a fortnight?” said my Lord. “I find I knew his father—a fine fellow and a good officer. The son shall be kept in mind, both for his sake and yours.”

“He has done all the harm that was



apprehended in his fortnight," said Mr. Incledon, "and now you must give him an extension of leave—enough to be married in. There's nothing else for it. You ought to do your best for him, for it is your fault."

Upon which my Lord, who was of a genial nature, laughed, and inquired into the story, which Mr. Incledon related to him, after a fashion, in a way which amused him hugely. The consequence was that Commander Wodehouse got his leave extended to three months, and was transferred from the China station to the Mediterranean. Mr. Incledon never told them who was the author of this benefit, though I think they had little difficulty in guessing. He sent Rose a *parure* of pearls and turquoises, simple enough for her youth, and the position she had preferred

to his—and sent the diamonds which had been reset for her back to his bankers; and then he went abroad. He did not go back to Whitton, even for necessary arrangements, but sent for all he wanted, and after that morning's work in the White House, returned to Dinglefield no more for years.

After this there was no possible reason for delay, and Rose was married to her sailor in the parish church by good Mr. Nolan, and instead of any other wedding tour, went off to cruise with him in the Mediterranean. She had regained her bloom, and merited her old name again before the day of the simple wedding. Happiness brought back colour and fragrance to the Rose in June; but traces of the storm that had almost crushed her

never altogether disappeared, from her heart, at least, if they did from her face. She cried over Mr. Incledon's letter the day before she became Edward Wodehouse's wife. She kissed the turquoises when she fastened them about her pretty neck. Love is the best, no doubt; but it would be hard if to other sentiments less intense even a bride might not spare a tear.

As for the mothers on either side, they were both indifferently satisfied. Mrs. Wodehouse would never unbend so much for months after as to say anything but "Good morning" to Mrs. Damerel, who had done her best to make her boy unhappy; and as for the marriage, now that it was accomplished after so much fuss and bother, it was, after all, nothing of a match for Edward. Mrs. Damerel, on her

side, was a great deal too proud to offer any explanations, except such as were absolutely necessary to those few influential friends who must be taken into every one's confidence who desires to keep a place in society. She told those confidants frankly enough that Edward and Rose had met accidentally, and that a youthful love, supposed to be over long ago, had burst forth again so warmly, that nothing could be done but to tell Mr. Incledon, and that he had behaved like a hero.

The Green for a little while was very angry with Rose; the ladies shook their heads at her, and said how very, very hard it was on poor Mr. Incledon. But Mr. Incledon was gone, and Whitton shut up, while Rose still remained with all the excitement of a pretty wedding in prospect,

and "a perfect romance" in the shape of a love-story. Gradually, therefore, the girl was forgiven; the richer neighbours went up to town and bought their presents, the poorer ones looked over their stores to see what they could give, and the girls made pieces of lace for her, and pin-cushions, and antimacassars; and thus her offence was condoned by all the world. Though Mrs. Damerel asked but a few people to the breakfast, the church was crowded to see the wedding, and all the gardens in the parish cut their best roses to decorate the old place, for it was in July, the end of the rose season. Dinglefield church overflowed with them, and the bridesmaids' dresses were trimmed with them, and every man in the place had some sort of a rosebud in his coat. And thus

it was half smothered in roses that the young people went away.

Mr. Incledon was not heard of for years after; but quite lately he came back to Whitton, married to a beautiful Italian lady, for whose sake it was, originally, as rumour now whispered, that he had remained unmarried so long. This lady had married and forsaken him nearly twenty years before, and had become a widow about the time that he left England. I hope, therefore, that though Rose's sweet youth and freshness had attracted him to her, and though he had regarded her with deep tenderness, hoping perhaps for a new, subdued, yet happy life through her means, there had been little passion in him to make his wound bitter after the mortification of the moment. The Contessa was a

woman of his own age, who had been beautiful, and was magnificent, a regal kind of creature, at home amid all the luxuries which his wealth provided, and filling a very different position from anything that could have been attainable by Rose. They dazzle the people on the Green when they are at Whitton, and the Contessa is as gracious and more inaccessible than any queen. She smiles at them all benignly, and thinks them an odd sort of gentle savages, talking over their heads in a voice which is louder and rounder than suits with English notions. And it is reported generally that Mr. Incledon and his foreign wife are "not happy." I cannot say anything about this, one way or another, but I am sure that the happiness he shares with the Contessa must be something of a very

different character from that which he would have had with Rose ; higher, perhaps, as mere love (you all say) is the highest ; but different—and in some things, perhaps, scarcely so homely-sweet.

When Rose heard of this, which she did in the harbour of an Italian port, she was moved by interest so true and lively that her husband was almost jealous. She read her mother's letter over and over, and could not be done talking of it. Captain Wodehouse after a while had to go on shore, and his wife sat on the deck while the blue waves grew bluer and bluer with evening under the great ship, and the Italian sky lost its bloom of sunset, and the stars came out in the magical heavens. What a lovely scene it was, the lights in the houses twinkling and rising tier on tier, the little lamps quivering at the mastheads,

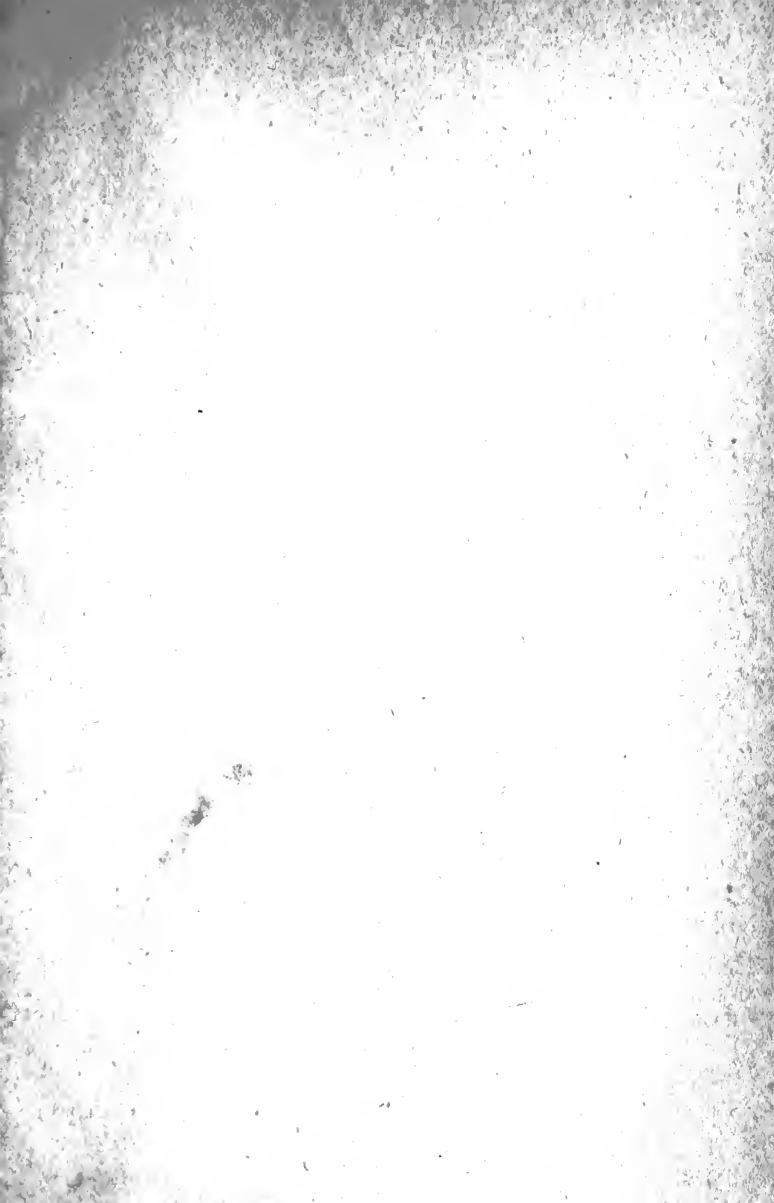


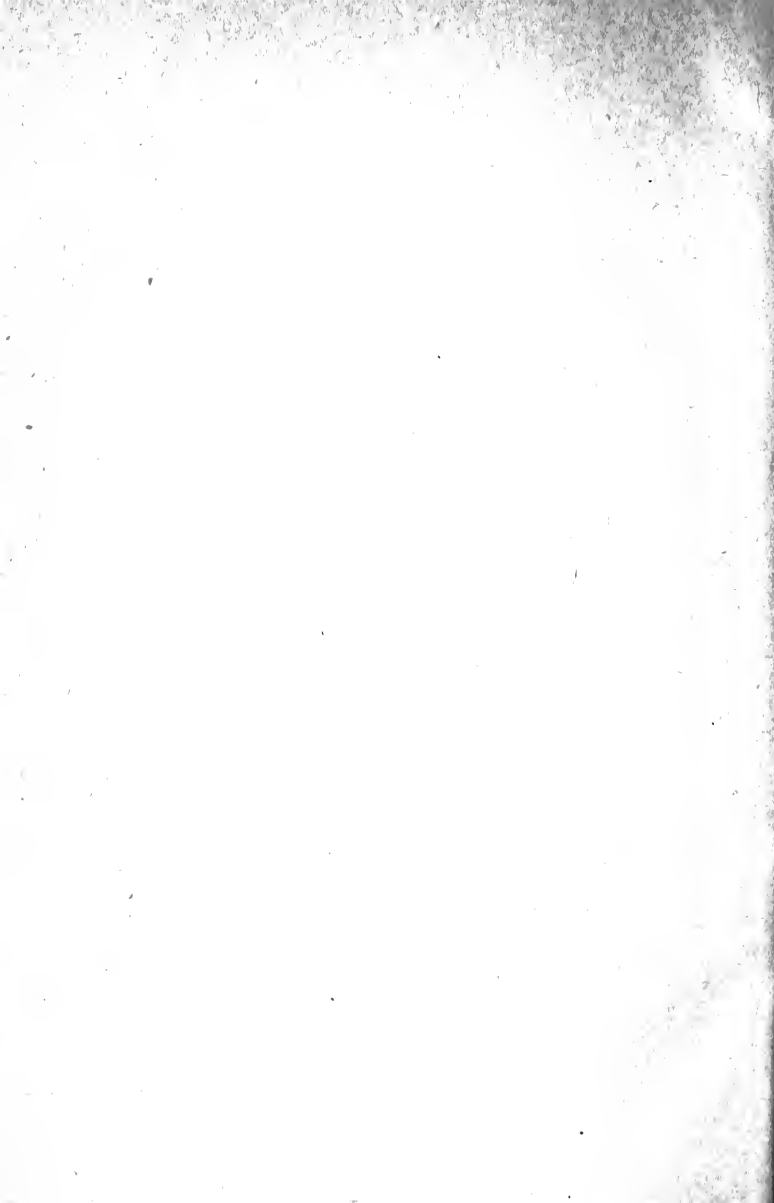
the stars in the sky ! Rose shut her soft eyes, which were wet—was it with dew ?—and saw before her not the superb Genoa, and the charmed Italian night, but the little Green, with its sunburnt grass, and houses standing round, in each one of which friendly eyes were shining. She saw the green old drawing-room of the White House, and the look he cast upon her as he turned and went away ; that was the day that the great happiness of her life came upon her ; and yet she had lost something, she could not tell what, when Mr. Incledon went away. And now he was married, and to his old love, one who had gone before herself in his heart, and came after her, and was its true owner. Rose shed a few tears quite silently in the soft night, which did not betray her. Her heart contracted for a moment with a

fanciful pang—was she jealous of this unknown woman? “God bless him!” she said to herself, with a little outburst of emotion. Did not she owe him all she had in the world?—good right had Rose to bid “God bless him! but yet there was an undisclosed shade of feeling which was not simple joy in his happiness, lingering in her heart.

“Do you think we could find out who this Contessa is?” she said to her husband when he returned. “I hope she is a good woman, and will make him happy.”

“Yes,” said Captain Wodehouse, “he is a good fellow, and deserves to be happy; and now you can be comfortable, my dear, for you see he has consoled himself,” he added, with a laugh.











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